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THE SQUIRE'S LEGACY.

VOL. I.

THE SQUIRE'S LEGACY.

BY

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“OLD MYDDELTON'S MONEY,”

“VICTOR AND VANQUISHED,”

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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THE SQUIRE'S LEGACY.

CHAPTER I.

NOT by any means that sort of room through which we steer correctly in the darkness, to lay our hand on any certain book or packet. On the contrary, it was that kind of room in which the book we seek has vanished out of sight (as books we seek have ever such a vicious trick of doing) and in which the one required packet of papers is always hidden in the last drawer we think of opening. A room in which the furniture had a knack of turning up unexpectedly in new spots, as if it enjoyed a revel on its own account, when left alone in the wide and lofty solitude ; and in which, when the oak shelves were cleared, and the books dusted every Springtime, paper-

knives and old letters fell from between their leaves as thickly as the white flakes of cherry-blossom fell in those long and dusky orchards by the river.

Not a neat and orderly room by any means. The first volume of *Puritan Divines* stood side by side with the second volume of *Black Sheep*; one riding-glove and a whip lay on a half-finished letter, and a little angry terrier stood with his fore-paws planted on a rare architectural design, while he snapped defiance, and wondered over the forbearance of half a dozen canine curios who lay about, unmoved by the sound to which they have been obliged, by degrees (and patience) to accustom themselves.

Not a neat room, indeed; and it would be as difficult to fancy it so as to realise what Turner's brush would have made of a modern London drawing-room; but who could deny its artistic luxury and beauty? High up to the arched roof—on which the frescoed gods and goddesses of a long-lived mythology had danced, and sung, and smiled, and slept, while generation after generation of the living occupants below passed from their sight—extended the rows of volumes which it had taken centuries to gather;

and, though so many were wrongly placed, the Squires of Kingswood—who all had loved their books and known them well, in a pleasant, desultory fashion—had been offered fabulous sums for only a few of these rare chosen volumes. And, though there were ink-spots on the gilded leather, and dogs lying on the velvet; and though the carving and the work of Florence but little accorded with the trophies of South Africa; or old Egyptian with the newest English devices; yet the medley formed a picture of true warmth and beauty and refinement. From the long row of windows, on one side of this room, stretched a wide view of the spreading park, with the deer peeping from its dim retreats, and the river gleaming like silver in the Spring sunshine, before it hid itself behind the slope of wooded park on the west. But only from one corner window could a glimpse be caught of the woods which rose behind the mansion like a crown above its calm grey front.

It is said that a Squire of Kingswood once, at a royal supper in the Brighton Pavilion, offered to present Kingswood, as a gift, to any commoner in England who could simply

show him a finer estate. And the merry guests accepted the challenge, and the Prince himself offered to be umpire. But it is said, too, that no seat could be found so wonderfully enriched by nature and art, and that the Prince came over and gave his verdict to that effect, under the carved and frescoed roof of this very library; and then had such a week of revelry within the fine old house that even *he* remembered it, until—his revelry over—he wore that plain court dress which boasts no flash of jewels.

The library at Kingswood was rarely unoccupied, and upon that bright Spring morning the fretful bark of the little terrier was not the chief sound which climbed to the painted ceiling. There seemed further cause for that broad smile upon the face of old Silenus; for Scot Monkton, the old Squire's only son, lying back in a folding chair of Italian workmanship—his hair almost the colour of the old bronze velvet cushions—had his cornet to his mouth, and was rehearsing his favourite airs in one unbroken programme, and in one key; a little excruciatingly now and then, it must be confessed, but generally with clear tone and unfaulty modulation.

“Capital!”

Scot bestowed that word of praise upon himself after he had, very softly and slowly, played through “Napolitaine;” but when, in the flush of self-satisfaction, he had attempted and re-attempted a peculiar variation of terrific compass, in which he could not please his own correct ear, he drew a slide from his instrument, and turned and glanced at the deerhound, who, in but ill-concealed anguish, sat behind the low chair, and occasionally just touched his master’s tumbled hair with his nose, as a gentle reminder that he had had what *he* considered quite sufficient in the way of musical entertainment.

“A failure, Monarch,” Scot said, with a laugh in his warm blue eyes; “an ignominious failure. But make the most of this delicious pause, old fellow, for I mean to try again and conquer. Here goes!”

The elaborate and original variation on “Napolitaine, I am dreaming of thee” was but two bars old, when it met an untimely death by the entrance of a tall, black-whiskered gentleman, who had been more than once heard to remark that *he* should have practised the

cornet too, but that he considered a gentleman's butler ought to have higher tastes.

"Oliver Wakeley's wife is here, sir. She wished me to tell you that her husband has been released this morning. She seemed anxious for you to know, and I promised to bring the message myself to you, sir."

"Thanks, Sutton. I'm very sorry for the poor girl."

"Her eyes ought to have been open, sir, when she married him. He'd been in prison before. This time that's over to-day is about the sixth that I can remember. I think his wife was anxious you should know he was free, sir. I fancy she wished me to warn the keepers."

"I would forget to do it if I were you," observed the young master, the lazy attitude rather at variance with the firmness of the bearded chin, and the pleasant look of the untired eyes. "Wakeley's poaching days are over, I fancy; and he will scarcely rob the poultry-yard again."

"But he would stick at nothing, sir. I am sure even his wife is afraid of what he may do next."

"We'll give him a chance, though," observed Scot, fitting the mouthpiece on his cornet, and drawing his handkerchief across his pointed beard, preparatory to a return to "Napoli-taine." "We may be very sure that the Squire will not let him off easily if he soon offends again; so I hope, if only for Anna's sake, that he *won't* offend again."

"Even she has no faith in him, sir."

Sutton made that remark without any expectation of an answer, and then retreated; silent and upright, just as Mr. Forbes, the Squire's private secretary, reached the library door, to be greeted by an upper "C," particularly clear and loud and well-sustained, from the young Squire's silver cornet. Again Scot's original variation broke off abruptly. He lowered his instrument, seeing that his father's secretary wished to speak to him.

"I am taking some business letters into Minton, to catch the afternoon mail. Can I post any for you? Or can I write any for you, Mr. Monkton?"

"Let me see—I'm sure I wrote it this morning. Is it there?"

"Here are a few lines written."

"What do they say?"

"My dear father, all right. Glad you have fixed Saturday, for I think that old chum of yours has kept you long enough. You will find me'—that is all, sir."

"Oh! well, just finish it up, Forbes, will you? Say he will find me at Grosvenor Place. I know he won't travel here on Sunday, and he won't like to be thrown back on his clubs. So I'll go up to town, and make myself at home in Grosvenor Place. Then end it—just as you'd end a letter of your own to a *pater*. Thank you, Forbes," he added, courteously, when the secretary rose with the letter in his hand: "Take the Dean, if you like. He will be fresh to-day, and will bring you back within the hour. Stay one moment, though, and tell me if I have that one note right now in *Pro Peccatis*."

Scot had just played the beautiful melody through; and the secretary stood with bent head, as he had stood throughout, failing to detect a false note, when a letter was brought in, which Scot Monkton, by a sign, directed should be given to Mr. Forbes.

"It is a request that the bearer—one Monsieur Philippe Sourdets—be allowed to visit the

picture-gallery here," explained the secretary, "and it is signed 'Stanley Monkton.'"

Scot burst into a hearty fit of laughter, and laid down his cornet beside a silver statuette of the Madonna which stood on a table near him.

"Why, that is the first letter Stanley Monkton ever wrote to me in his life. It shall be honoured, by Jove, though he is a——"

"Is not Mr. Stanley Monkton next heir to Kingswood?"

"Yes; so you did right to pull me up. Now what about this Frenchman? Must I take Artaud as an interpreter?"

Forbes laughed at the idea of an educated gentleman like Scot Monkton using his valet as interpreter.

"Perhaps Monsieur Sourdets may speak English as easily as you speak French," he said.

The picture-gallery at Kingswood ran along the whole length of the house, and was strikingly beautiful as well as vast. Therefore Scot Monkton's surprise at his companion's start of admiration, clearly proved that *he* was not the one accustomed to show this splendid gallery.

"I always preferred going alone over the

foreign picture-galleries," observed Scot, sauntering along with his deerhound at his heels. "If you feel so, monsieur, I will leave you here."

"I would rather," said the Frenchman, speaking in perfect, though not the purest, English, and with a smiling, though rather intent, gaze into the young Englishman's face, "that I had your society, and any information you will vouchsafe."

"The man is a snob," mused Scot; "but, as my father's cousin sent him, I must forget that unpleasant fact."

"You are of course a connoisseur in pictures," he observed aloud, wondering a little at the suavity of his companion's manner. "I shall have no need to point out to you the choice paintings. This? Yes, this is valuable—though not a pleasing subject—'St. Lawrence on the Gridiron,' by Pellegrino. Beyond, you see a whole galaxy of kings and courtiers, by Holbein and Sir Peter Lely; no need to point out which are Vandyck's heads, or call your attention to that Sacred Head by Albert Dürer."

Scot felt that he was creditably fulfilling his novel and self-imposed task, and was very much

inclined to compliment himself aloud ; but, after a few more explanatory sentences, he fell back mentally upon his old opinion as to Monsieur Sourdét's want of claim to the title of gentleman, and grew a little irritable as his elaborate obsequiousness now and then amounted to downright servility. In no respect was the contrast between them more marked than in this—Scot's natural, high-bred ease and courtesy being inseparable from him in his most careless moods, and Philippe Sourdét's fictitious polish being dropped in his unguarded moments, and resumed with a sudden and spasmodic effort.

"The value of these portraits," observed Scot, pointing down the gallery from where they stood, "is due to the artists, rather than the subjects ; for they are all my own ancestors."

"I am proud to be introduced to so many Monktons," said the Frenchman, with a smile and bow, and with a brightening of both tone and glance which was not lost upon the keen young Englishman. "May I ask you to assist me here with your superior knowledge ? For instance"—he had sauntered on, his heavy dark eyes leaving no pictured face unscrutinised, until he stood before the portrait of a young

man in the costume of thirty years ago, with a narrow delicate face and thin dark hair—"is that the youthful portrait of the present Squire?"

"My father? No, nor at all like him, though his brother."

"His—younger brother, I presume?"

"Why presume it, monsieur?"

The young Squire asked the question without thought, as his eyes rested upon the painted face which formed so strong a contrast to his own; and so he did not see how keenly the Frenchman watched him, while, without a sound, he drew something from his pocket. "No, he was my father's elder brother," continued Scot, in his mellow and rather lazy tones. "He died young; indeed he and his wife both died within two years of their marriage. Monarch, stand back; Sir Joshua's colours were not laid on for the benefit of your nose." Scot had stepped forward after his dog; and as he did so Monsieur Sourdets' eyes moved, quickly and shrewdly, twice backwards and forwards, between the picture of which he had spoken and something which he held concealed in the palm of his hand.

"How melancholy!" he said then, as young Monkton turned to join him again. "Did the tragic events occur at Kingswood?"

"Yes. He married just before my grandfather's death. My grandfather was very fond of Lady Emily Stuart, and wished the marriage to take place before his death, little thinking how soon both bride and bridegroom were to follow him."

"Most melancholy," observed the Frenchman, stepping back a pace, his arms folded so that the closed fingers of one hand were not visible. "But he certainly must have been delicate and—weak; pardon me, for he is undoubtedly what you English call high-bred."

"Undoubtedly," returned Scot, with a glimpse of the natural, quiet haughtiness which lay below his easy cordiality.

"I am wearying you, I fear," said Monsieur Sourdét, with a full, critical glance into his companion's face; "but these, as works of art, interest me greatly."

"If only as works of art," said Scot, "let me advise you to hurry on, and enjoy those landscapes of Claude's."

"Ah," exclaimed Sourdét, moving only one

step forward, "that must surely have been the Lady Emily Stuart—Monkton, I should say. The portraits are evidently a pair. She is—well, hardly so beautiful as I should have imagined."

"She was very winning, and very good," returned Scot, coolly. "And she obtained a wonderful influence over young Scot Monkton, who had chiefly, I believe, before that time, been notable for succumbing to evil influence only."

"Your father's brother had your name, then, sir," remarked Monsieur Sourdets, with a bow, "though in features you are so great a contrast. He was pale, too, and slight in figure. Was there no likeness in any respect, Mr. Monkton—in height, say, or voice?"

"He died five years before my birth," returned Scot, quietly dismissing the personal questions. "That is the portrait of my father, the owner of Kingswood," he continued, passing slowly on; "and there, of course, you recognise myself; and then follow dozens more of us, whom you could not recognise, made famous only, as I said before, by Lawrence, and Reynolds, and Gainsborough, and other master hands."

"Allow me to detain you one moment," put in Monsieur Sourdets, pausing, and pointing at random, while his eyes went back surreptitiously to that pictured face he had been studying.

"That!" cried Scot, with unfeigned astonishment, as he followed the man's finger, but not his gaze. "How can you need that portrait named, when it was from the original that you brought to-day the introduction to this gallery?"

Even over the Frenchman's swarthy skin the colour spread rapidly under Scot's questioning gaze.

"Yes—surely yes. I distinguish the likeness now, Mr. Monkton," explained Sourdets, with evident eagerness. "Of course I ought to have recognized Mr. Stanley Monkton's portrait in a moment, when he has been so complaisant to me."

"You do know him, then?" questioned Scot, coolly.

"Know him, sir! Is it not to him that I owe this day's enjoyment? Has he not often talked to me abroad of this beautiful estate which—since I have had the honour of seeing

you, Mr. Monkton—I feel him to have but the very feeblest chance of possessing?”

“This man,” mused Scot again to himself, without a trace of the thought upon his face, “is a liar as well as a snob.”

“That is pretty,” observed Sourdets, making an effort to interest himself further in the portraits, now that he had changed his position.

“Yes,” said Scot, glancing at the cold and colourless picture of a young lady in a muslin dress and sylvan hat; “a cousin of my father’s. She lived here until she was five-and-thirty, and then married and went abroad; and we have never heard of her since. That is fifteen years ago.”

“How could she bear to quit the luxury of Kingswood to share a soldier’s wandering life?”

“You spring rather rapidly to conclusions,” remarked Scot, with a smile. “Her husband was an engineer.”

“Probably she was the first Monkton who ever formed a *mésalliance*?” inquired the Frenchman, with a sinister smile upon his lips.

“She was not a Monkton.”

So Scot dismissed the subject, not thinking it worth while to tell this man that their

notions might vary on that point, as well as on many others.

They had gone down the whole length of the gallery, when the south door near them opened, and Mr. Forbes advanced to Scot, with an irrepressible smile upon his face.

"A lady is below, Mr. Monkton, inquiring for you. She arrived in the fly from Patten Station, just as I dismounted; so I am come to ask if I may supply your place here."

When the introduction was over, and Scot had left the gallery, Monsieur Sourdets turned with a smile to the young secretary.

"None of these knights and dames," he said, in his slow, harsh tones, "need feel ashamed of their young representative of to-day. One is forced to admire his sunburnt face and muscular, well-knit figure. And yet perhaps in height—I do not know, but I fancy so—he would be inferior to most of his race. Is it not fact?"

"Mr. Monkton is just the average height, I believe," returned the secretary, wondering, as Scot had done, at these personal remarks. "His father is three inches taller, as was his grandfather."

"And the uncle whose name he bears—was he not taller too?"

"I really do not know," was the almost impatient reply. "I know nothing of him save his picture; and that proves him to have been as unlike as possible to Mr. Scot Monkton."

"I owe him a debt of gratitude," observed the Frenchman, with a suave smile; "yet I know I have wearied him; for, with all his courtesy, he could not hide the drawing-room languor inherent in young men of his rank."

"Probably, monsieur," said Mr. Forbes, with a laugh, "you have heard what sort of men make the best heroes when called to arms. At any rate, I would rather be on his side than against him, when the young Squire's fighting time shall come."

"I scarcely follow your figurative speech, sir," said Philippe Sourdet, with a hidden sneer in his bland tone of apology. "Does Mr. Monkton intend to join the Army, do I understand?"

"Certainly not, except figuratively, as you said. He travels a good deal—he has but lately returned from the East—but he always enjoys Kingswood best of all. He loves the beautiful

old place dearly; and he is as much master here as the Squire himself."

In the meantime Scot had descended to the hall, a great amusement as well as astonishment shining in his eyes as he advanced to where a small, middle-aged lady, with a colourless complexion and in a colourless dress, stood weeping silently, while she watched two footmen carrying a huge box into the hall, and while the station fly still waited before the door, looking very shabby in the glare of the Springsunshine, and in the midst of its splendid surroundings. Scot involuntarily paused a moment, in wonder at this unexpected arrival, and then a sudden recognition broke upon his face.

"Aunt Michal! What a surprise!"

"Tell them where to take my box, Scot," said the little lady, drying her tears feebly, and laying a limp hand within his arm. "I am come."

"So I see, Aunt Michal," returned Scot, with his pleasant laugh. "Mrs. Sutton will manage all about the boxes and things. And, Sutton, you hasten luncheon, and lay for the French—gentleman who is upstairs." As he spoke, he led his unexpected visitor into the room nearest

which they had met, and stood opposite the couch on which she had sunk despondently.

"I won't ask you any questions until you have rested, aunt," said Scot, at a loss as to his expected mode of consolation.

"Why should you ask any questions at all?" she cried, with unlooked-for vehemence. "I am come back—that's all."

"And I am very glad to see you, Aunt Michal," said the young Squire, with reckless hospitality, "though I ought not to have slipped back into my boyish trick of calling you aunt, ought I? Do you remember how it amused Mr. Hawthorne?"

"I remember nothing about him. And I'm your father's cousin now, as I was then, and your aunt," was the illogical retort, delivered in a flood of tears which seemed to be capable of disappearing as suddenly as they could be evoked. "I forget all about him. I'm come back Michal Windish, just as I went away."

"But you went away Mrs. Hawthorne," laughed Scot, "in an open bridal carriage, with slippers falling round it, and handfuls of rice clinging to your wedding bonnet and to my cousin Hawthorne's long beard."

"I hate rice—and slippers," Miss Michal announced, in a tone almost bordering on cheerfulness, "and I've done with Luke Hawthorne. He's done no harm—you needn't look such a question—but we just found that, 'like the pair that tell the weather, we could never live together.' Thank goodness I remembered I'd another home; so I came to it. That's all."

"From where, Aunt Michal?"

"I forget; it was three thousand miles away. Will luncheon soon be ready?"

"But——"

"Don't question me, Scot. You don't look rude and inquisitive, but I won't answer any questions even from you. I am Miss Windish, as I was during the five-and-thirty years I lived here before; and I won't put it into your power to answer any interfering questions, nor oblige you to tell a falsehood for my sake."

"But I was going to say, would it not be wiser to keep the name by which, for fifteen years, we have all known you?"

"I'm tired of it," was the brisk retort; "it always was hideous. I like Windish best, and I don't see why I shouldn't claim my own old property. There, we've done with that subject

now ; don't mention Luke again, nor that unfortunate occurrence of the rice and slippers. He wasn't to blame—nobody was to blame, except you ; you were his best man, and took him to the church ; you were but a lad, of course, but you might have known better."

"At any rate, Aunt Michal," said Scot, detecting an under-current of self-reproach in every tone, whether defiant or dejected, "my father will be delighted to find you here when he returns."

A prompt burst of tears greeted this polite observation.

"Delighted !" she sobbed, laying vehement hold on this new grievance. "How can he be delighted ? Who is ever likely to be delighted by seeing me ? But" (more cheerfully) "I'd nowhere else to go, so I came here. I shall fit into my old place presently ; but I've been unused to this life lately, Scot, and the house seems so enormous, and so full of servants. But still," she added, with a satisfied glance down the suite of magnificent drawing-rooms, "I'm sure I shall find enough to do in keeping the rooms neat. I can actually see two pianos open—and look at all those mathematical

instruments thrown on that mosaic table."

"How do you know they were thrown, Aunt Michal?" asked Scot, pleasantly. "But see—here is Mrs. Sutton, to show you to your rooms; she evidently remembers you."

"I will thank you now," said Miss Windish, standing, small and weak, before the portly figure of the housekeeper, "to drop that name by which you have falsely addressed me, my good woman. I remember you as Mrs. Sutton, you remember me as Miss Windish. I entirely forget what has occurred since then, and so do you. That's all."

"I understand, ma'am," returned the housekeeper, prudently avoiding her young master's laughing eyes.

In less than half an hour Miss Windish, with no trace of her three thousand miles' journey, sat just in her old place at the long dining-table—a little nervous, as if the scene and position were unfamiliar to her, but with such a struggle against the betrayal of this fact that only shrewd eyes could have detected it; but then the eyes round the table that day *were* shrewd.

The dining-room at Kingswood, even during

this mid-day meal, was a scene of luxury and pomp, far more novel to Monsieur Sourdets than it could be to Miss Windish, even after a fifteen years' absence. The richness and beauty of the furniture and appointments, the delicacies of the table and rarity of the wines—in fact, the splendour and profusion of everything,—caused the Frenchman a feeling oddly compounded of both envy and self-gratulation; and minute after minute his manner grew more painfully obsequious, while the well-trained servants wondered curiously why this strange man had not been left to lunch alone.

“Have you finished your examination of the pictures, Monsieur Sourdets?” inquired Scot, pleasant and genial in his character of host, though his whole nature recoiled from this man; “and are you not tired of it?”

“I should never be tired of such occupation, Mr. Monkton; and just as you spoke I was about to ask you if I might see the family photographs. You have some very valuable ones, I have heard.”

A cloud gathered on Scot Monkton's brow. Did his cousin's letter oblige him to show this man private family property? He would do

much for Stanley Monkton, because it was so hard for him to have a healthy life between himself and a fine estate which he might have inherited; but still he surely need not do that.

"You must be very fond of studying family portraits," he said, idly.

"You must be very clever at it," observed Miss Windish, her light eyes fixed upon the Frenchman's face with no expression at all, though he stirred uncomfortably under their gaze; "very clever, indeed, to have recognised me from a poor portrait taken thirty years ago."

"I could not mistake you, madam," he answered, with a bow. "And it is a favourite study of mine, Mr. Monkton."

"It must be," remarked the young secretary, addressing Scot, "for Monsieur Sourdets has allowed me to understand that he has spent two years in this study among the English gentry."

"Then have you not discovered," asked Scot, "that the English gentry—like the English peasantry—like to possess one or two little articles of property which they may call exclusively their own?"

"I hope my ignorance may be excusable," rejoined the Frenchman, with a tightening of his heavy lips, "on the plea that I am not myself an Englishman. I have the misfortune to be a native of the Alps, upon the French side."

Miss Windish raised her round light eyes once more.

"Then perhaps," she questioned, deliberately, "you know San Remo?"

"Intimately." As he answered, he drew his napkin slowly across his lips, looking down upon his plate the while. "No spot in the world is more familiar to me; the first five-and-twenty years of my life were passed in that neighbourhood."

"And the second five-and-twenty have not obliterated its memory?"

Scot cut off his aunt's speech hastily. What right had she to make a guess, however true a one, at the age of his guest?

"What do you think of this neighbourhood, Monsieur Sourdhet?"

"I think it perfect. As I came from the station I noticed one picturesque house on your estate, Mr. Monkton, in which the masons and carpenters were at work. It is about to be

tenanted, I presume. It is a beautiful spot for anyone to have chosen."

"It is the Kingswood Dower House," explained Scot, "and it is let again to an old tenant who occupied it many years ago—Colonel Egerton, Aunt Michal."

"I remember," put in Miss Windish, in a slow tone. "He had the Dower House when he was home from the Cape on sick leave, with his second wife. He had a son in the Army, who kept the house on for a time after his father left."

"Yes; and now Colonel Egerton will have with him only the daughter of his second wife, a little girl he left behind in London, if you recollect—a little girl, I say, but I suppose she must be seventeen or eighteen now. He was so glad to find he could have the old house again. He is leaving the Army now."

"Young Egerton was a Royal Engineer, I remember. Where is he?"

"You must ask the Colonel," said Scot; but even his aunt could see that he purposely turned aside the question.

"You don't remember Arthur Egerton?" she said, snappishly.

"Why, of course I do, Aunt Michal. Recollect, I am nearly thirty."

"In your grade, Mr. Monkton," said the Frenchman, with a smile, "age can be no secret, can it? That is one of the penalties of riches."

The long, luxurious meal had come to an end now, and directly Miss Windish rose from the table, Monsieur Sourdets took his leave. As soon as ever he had left the grand old house behind, and Scot's pleasant high-bred tones could be heard no longer, a certain air of relief was evident both in the face and figure of the Frenchman; his bearing relaxed, and the suave smile gave place to one of reckless cunning.

"Yet the young swell gave me a first-rate dinner," he said, as if finishing a thought aloud; "the best dinner I ever ate—that had a grace before it. He's lavish in everything else; we shall see about the money presently."

It was by no means the direct way to the station which Monsieur Sourdets was taking. He had turned aside from the high road, and was following the narrow field-path which, for a little space, skirted the famous woods behind Kingswood. Leaving the woods then, he came

presently upon a cottage which stood by itself upon the slope, a row of slender poplars behind it, and a neat little garden in front. Against the door of this cottage lounged a man whom Monsieur Sourdets appeared to recognise in a moment. With a resumption of that smile which for a time he had laid aside, he pushed open the narrow gate, and addressed this man with a familiarity which totally failed in its attempt at ease.

"I have called in, as I said I would, to thank you for your guidance this morning. As you remarked, it is not difficult for a man to find his way to Kingswood."

"No, it takes up a deal too much of the county—so I think."

"You are right," returned the Frenchman, blandly. "The mother-country should be more equally divided among her sons. I want to ask you to be my pilot once again."

The man—a coarse-featured, broad-built fellow, with a moody scowl upon his face, and a suspicious inclination for the support of the door-post—stared incredulously at these words; but the look changed to one of surly satisfaction when Philippe Sourdets took a flask from

his pocket, and proposed that they should refresh themselves before starting, if glasses and water were obtainable.

The man turned and led the way into the cottage, and, as Sourdets followed, a woman rose from a seat at the window, and moved towards the door. The Frenchman's eyes followed her, partly in admiration, partly in surprise—the exquisite neatness of her hair and dress being, even in his eyes, so out of place in the home of this ruffian, who had to-day completed his tenth term of imprisonment.

“Go back!” he shouted. “No sneakin’ away! You needn’t speak; nobody wants to hear ye; but you’ll just stay theer. When a man has purty things of his own, he likes to be able to see ’em, and feel he owns ’em.”

“Perhaps your wife,” said Sourdets, with a smile, as the young woman went silently back to her seat, and he studied the pretty outlines of her figure, and the sad droop of her head in its prim white cap, “will kindly prove herself as useful as she is ornamental, Wakeley, and provide us with water and glasses?”

“D’ye hear?” called Wakeley, without addressing his wife by name. And she rose and

set what he wanted on the table. Everything was so spotlessly clean in the little cottage that the men, as they sat and drank there, looked like two huge blots, which would leave their stain for ever on its whiteness.

"An overbearing despot, I'll wager. He looked as if he'd as soon march a tenant off to gaol as he'd send a horse to be shod. I can quite understand your determination to pay him out for this last detention."

So Sourdets answered the question as to whether he had seen young Monkton; and Anna Wakeley raised her head slightly as she listened, though her needle never halted in its task.

"Only wait till I get the chance!" was the rough retort. "Theer's plenty about as 'ate him as well as me, only they want a leader. You've no cause to love him, I s'pose."

"Indeed, no!" laughed Sourdets, rubbing his hands softly. "But after my next interview I shall be able to tell you more. At any rate, he ought not to be allowed to tread upon his tenants' necks."

"I'll stop that some day," muttered Oliver Wakeley, morosely.

His wife rose suddenly from her seat at the window, and came between them.

"I don't know who you are," she said, addressing the Frenchman, "nor why you come here; but you shall not utter such words uncontradicted in my hearing! The young Squire of Kingswood is loved, and not hated, by his tenants. Ask them—ask any one of them who is not a poacher and a—— Ask anyone on all the estate, except my own husband. The young Squire is a brave, generous, friendly gentleman, and they all know it, and are proud to say it. *He* stand on the necks of his tenants! Go away, and tell those falsehoods where they will be believed! My husband hardly knows what he is saying to-day; but *you* know, and so I will not hear you."

"Be more gracious; do be more gracious," pleaded Sourdets, with a sneer on his lips. "Your tantrums are not so becoming as your demure mood over there; though the colour improves your face—by Jupiter, it does! There, there, be calm, and sit down again. Your husband is perfectly sober, and a very sensible fellow—so sensible that, if you don't take care, he will be terribly angry with you."

"Angry!" cried the man, his half-drunken

ferocity roused by this hint. "If you don't mind yer own business, my girl, we'll soon know who's master. D'ye think I don't know who sent me to gaol?"

"*I* do," returned the woman, steadily; "you have yourself to thank. Honest men don't lodge in gaol three or four times a year, as you used to do before you came to live here. To pretend it was the Squire's fault! Why, Mr. Monkton pardoned you the first time! Do you forget?"

"Men don't forget this sort o' thing anyway," was the sullen retort.

"You are right," assented Sourdet, promptly. "I never could either forgive or forget such treatment."

Dropping her eyes slowly from his face, Anna Wakeley turned away, and took her seat and her work again. When the men rose to leave, Sourdet asked her a question suddenly.

"Have you a bed-room to spare in this neat little cottage?"

"Bed-room? Yes," put in her husband, eagerly, while her head was still bent over her work. "She knows as we've one to spare. D'ye want it?"

"Not to-night; but—presently. May I consider it mine, Mrs. Wakeley?"

She raised her eyes with one appealing glance at her husband.

"No, no!" she cried. "Harm may come of it, Oliver. Tell him, no."

The man made one step forward, with his hand raised, as if he would strike her. Even Sourdet shrank back a little. But bravely and calmly she stood before her husband, and his unsteady hand fell to his side again.

"You'll do as I make ye, anyway," he muttered, as he turned away.

"Then we will consider that settled," said the Frenchman, kissing his hand to Anna Wakeley, smiling to see the silent pain upon her face, while her head bent lower and lower over her work. "And don't be fanciful, my good girl, or harm *may* come of it."

CHAPTER II.

WHEN Monsieur Sourdets had taken his departure from Kingswood, Miss Windish followed Scot to the open hall door, where he stood whistling softly to himself, and wondering whether his aunt would rest this afternoon, and leave him free for a ride; for what but a gallop could scatter the unpleasant reminiscences of Monsieur Philippe Sourdets, and afford him an escape from feminine tears? It was just as he had decided to make a struggle for it that Miss Windish touched him on the shoulder with two weak fingers.

"He might just as well have chosen another day," she whined, her round eyes profusely flooded. "Why should he have come just the day I came?"

"And, on the other hand, Aunt Michal, why should he not?"

"Don't smile about it, Scot," fretted Miss Michal, with a sudden change from damp entreaty to dry petulance. "I don't like the look of it."

"Don't be superstitious, Aunt Michal. Superstition is such bosh."

"I *am* superstitious, Scot. I've seen so much that no wonder I'm superstitious."

"But you'll see so much more," said Scot, composedly, "that your wonder will be that you ever could have been superstitious, Aunt Michal."

"Scot," whispered Miss Windish, with broken utterance, "I'm certain he had a motive for coming here—I'm certain of it—and a motive in every question he asked."

"Of course he had. People always have."

"Wasn't his complexion awfully saturnine?"

"And his 'motive' was to show it us, you mean?"

"There are lots of priceless paintings here, murmured Miss Windish, in an aggrieved tone "but you know, as well as I do, that he made no remarks upon those. He was much more interested in you and your relations than in any artist, living or dead."

"And preferred Michal Angela to Michael Angelo, eh? To tell the truth, aunt," added Scot, as he drew his cigar-case from his pocket, "I've had sufficient of that Franco-Englishman for to-day; and if you haven't, I hope you'll think him over while you rest. You must need a good rest now, I'm sure; but I hope I shall see you at dinner. We dine just as we used to do, at half-past seven."

"I don't like to be left. I daresay there's nothing for me to do all over the house."

"Then come with me," proposed Scot, with a spasm of self-denial.

"Well, that is inconsiderate," returned Miss Michal, briskly, "when I haven't even unpacked."

"Then good-bye," laughed Scot, raising his hat.

He went slowly down the marble steps, lighting his cigar; and ten minutes afterwards he rode from the stable-yard, across the park, to that portion of it which was open to the public, and at the farther end of which stood the Dower House. When he came from the wooded avenue, out into the open drive which, passing the fair stretch of lawn before the Dower House,

led into the highway, he became aware of the hurrying tread of horses behind him. Scot, knowing he should meet no strangers in his own park, drew bridle and waited. They were two young ladies, who rode up to him, with a groom in attendance; yet Scot's eyes were quizzical rather than pleased when, after his greeting, he guided his little chestnut mare to walk beside them.

"What an unexpected pleasure to have met you here, Mr. Monkton!" said the girl nearest to him. "Isn't it, Vi?" turning to appeal to her sister.

"Very," assented Violet, without any misgivings as to whether Scot would feel it natural to be unexpected in his own park.

"If they would drop their bridle hands, and sit a little straighter, it would not so much matter," Scot was musing to himself; but he only said aloud that it was a great pleasure to have met them. And he thought he meant it, too.

Ever since young Mr. Levey and his sisters had bought an estate near Kingswood—which they named Osborne House, and made, both without and within, like a showy London villa

—Scot had schooled himself to follow what he considered the dictates of his conscience (people were given to say, even then, that Scot Monkton had rather a peculiar conscience), and accept genially the right hand of fellowship held out to him so persistently by the wealthy son and daughters of a Jew usurer, whose father and grandfather had been usurers before him. But though, to all appearance, his effort was a complete success, Scot could not help it that their conduct and conversation grated so often upon his senses, or that their shallow and paraded polish was all but repugnant to him, as a sturdy English gentleman, *thorough* in all he said or did.

It was an evident fact that Bernard Levey tried to form himself upon the model of the young Squire of Kingswood; but the attempt was an ignoble failure, and it was better for Mr. Levey that it should be so. In his own line, as a well-meaning, well-dressed young man, with a hundred tastes, and very little proficiency, and possessing a pious horror of two things which were somewhat at variance with the practices of his ancestors—soiled hands, and a dislike of spending the coin of the realm—Bernard Levey,

as master in his spick-and-span mansion, was a small lion in his way. But when he openly betrayed any imitation of Scot Monkton he became amusingly ridiculous. It was said that Beriah was the name his parents had given him when his white, aquiline features had been very much smaller, and surrounded by a broad cap-border ; but that on attaining years of discretion he had discarded this Hebrew prænomen, and assumed one more congenial to his position as a member of the landed gentry of England. It was said, with equal truth, that the floral appellations of Rose and Violet had been at the same time appropriated by his sisters, in preference to those of Susannah and Sarai, by which they had been known to the friends of their early youth ; but, though Scot had laughed over this legend, wondering which sister was Susannah and which Sarai, he always acknowledged to himself that they had acted wisely in their generation.

“It is so pleasant to have you at home again, Mr. Monkton,” observed Miss Levey. “We found it so dull to ride or drive every day, and never meet anybody worth meeting all those months, didn’t we, Vi?”

"Very. Are you yourself glad to be at home, Mr. Monkton?"

"Something like love for the old place brought me home, Miss Levey."

"But I'm afraid you will be going off again soon?"

"Of course.

'Sated with home, of wife and children tired,
The restless soul is driven abroad to roam—
Sated abroad, all seen, yet naught admired,
The restless soul is driven to wander home!'"

"But why mention a wife and children, Mr. Monkton," inquired Violet, raising her eyebrows, "when you have none, you know?"

"I declare," laughed Scot, "that fact never struck me so forcibly before."

"I fear you will be going up to London presently," observed Rose Levey, apparently addressing her horse.

"I go on Saturday, but only to meet my father. I may go up again, later on in the season."

"I am selfish enough to hope you will not—aren't you, Vi? There is so very little society here, and Bernard does not intend to take a house in town yet."

Now Scot Monkton knew, as well as they themselves knew, that London was objectionable to the Leveys, from the fact of their father's calling being so well known there; and that it was only after having, through four successive seasons, tried, and failed, to enter the charmed limits of "town society," that they had brought themselves to be content with a rural spot, where they fancied their antecedents wrapped in a vague and aristocratic mystery. But, though he knew this, Scot only answered pleasantly that they would have a little extra society when Colonel Egerton and his daughter came. They had reached then the entrance gates at the Dower House, and they had paused almost involuntarily to watch the men at work.

"Miss Egerton will simply be a school-girl," remarked Miss Levey. "We have heard that she is still at school. As we rode past here this morning," she added, presently, with the inquisitiveness that belongs to a shallow, jealous nature, "we saw the station fly going up to Kingswood; didn't we, Vi?"

"I daresay," returned Scot, readily; "an aunt of mine came home from abroad."

"Unexpectedly?"

"She is a relation, and one always expects relations to turn up at any moment; else what's the good of being a relation?"

"We will call upon her," said Violet, leaning across her sister, and exhibiting a row of large white teeth. "See," she added, as at this moment they caught sight of a figure walking directly towards them, beyond the gardens of the Dower House. "It is Miss Chamberlain. Isn't it comical to see the airs she puts on? You would think she was the Lady Superior of some holy sisterhood, and thought us all too wicked to talk to. Now isn't it really absurd, Mr. Monkton, that she and her brother should shut themselves up at Comely Place, as if they were too precious to mix with the vulgar herd?"

"I think, perhaps," said Scot, in his pleasant, idle tones, "that, as a rule, people are the best judges of their own affairs. So I need not trouble you with my opinion, nor will I trouble Miss Chamberlain with it; though, if you will excuse me, I will meet her across the garden here."

After they had parted from him, with smiles and handshakes, the sisters looked after Scot, until

they saw him dismount, and join Miss Chamberlain on foot, the bridle of his horse over his arm. Then they walked their tall horses along the turnpike road, and wondered what Scot Monkton could see in that gloomy Margaret Chamberlain to make him always treat her so deferentially.

"I did not mean to startle you, Margaret," Scot said, as, with his left hand, he opened a little gate leading into the lawn, and with his right took hers. "I saw you were coming to the Dower House, and I was coming too."

It was such a different tone from that in which he had addressed his late companions—a tone so true and kind, and full of heartfelt sympathy.

"Yes, I was really on my way to the Dower House," said Margaret Chamberlain, a faint blush rising in her grave face—she was a woman of eight-and-twenty, and the blush was not quick to mount now.

"We shall both be glad to have the old house occupied again, shan't we, Margaret? Especially by Colonel Egerton and his little girl; because he and his son used to be such friends of ours."

"She will not even remember her step-brother?" Margaret said the words as if they were a question, looking up almost anxiously into the young man's face, her own paling, and a slow, nervous motion stirring her hands as they hung before her; while the two friends sauntered on through the neglected garden, the fresh young beauty of the Spring afternoon around them, the tangled flowers at their feet, and the lowering sun brightening the poplar buds above them.

"Hardly," smiled Scot; "but I hope she will remind us of him; and I hope she will be your friend, Margaret."

"I—I was thinking, as I came along," she said, the faint colour again in her cheeks, "how much pleasanter it will be for you to have neighbours here."

"But a man ought to be independent of his neighbours," the young man rejoined, with a laugh. "How is Steven?"

"Very well," she answered, softly, while a great earnestness shone in her raised eyes. "He has walked to Minton to-day."

"Really! Then I will ride to meet him." The words were light enough, but the eyes that

met Margaret's gave a steadfast answering glance, which brought to her lips a smile of real pleasure which was very rare there.

"Oh, Margaret," cried Scot, before he parted from her, after walking with her to her own home, "Aunt Michal has come back; and please remember she has come back in her old name, too. She will be so pleased if you seem to have forgotten all about her husband. Can you remember her at all?"

"Oh yes; and my old wonder why she should have been named after Saul's daughter. Is she changed?"

"Her eyes are a little more moist, and her voice a little sharper. Poor cousin Michal!"

"She will be very happy at Kingswood," said Margaret, without proffering a call, as the Misses Levey had done, though Scot's confidence had been so different to her. Then they parted, Margaret turning slowly out of the Spring sunshine, and Scot riding on to the county town.

The dressing-bell had long ceased to clang its summons through the house when he dismounted at Kingswood, and hurried into the hall.

"I must just try if I remember the melody,"

he said to himself, passing on to the library; "I shall have time."

But in the library, before his eyes had fallen upon his cornet, another object arrested them—Miss Windish, sitting very upright upon a couch, in a little oasis of neatness, and in profuse and doleful tears.

"You've been lonely, Aunt Michal!" exclaimed Scot, with genuine sympathy. "I've been a bear. Never mind, we shall be all right to-morrow. We'll have parties, and all sorts of things. We'll get plenty of excitement for you. What shall come first—a dinner, or croquet, or a picnic, or a dance? Yes, that will do, won't it?"

Miss Michal's tears fell faster, and Scot puzzled his brains for another suggestion.

"What ever makes you cry, Aunt Michal?" he asked at last, as a new idea.

"The house is so large," she sobbed, "and so beautiful, and so full of servants. There's—there's nothing for me to do."

"Wait a day or two to rest, and you'll find plenty to do after that," smiled Scot, greatly relieved. "I'm afraid we can't remedy the size of the house just at present; but you'll soon feel that it's not an inch too large."

CHAPTER III.

IT was four o'clock in the afternoon of the following Saturday, and the London mail was due at Western Junction; but even London mails are not unfrequently overdue, and so the would-be passengers, though they chafed impatiently at the delay, wore no anxiety upon their faces; and not one turned back, at that last moment; with a presage of evil at his heart. Four-seventeen, and the train had been due at four! One of the would-be passengers, who had testily grudged the seventeen wasted minutes, was a tall, elderly gentleman, whose luggage, at the farther end of the platform, was guarded by a servant in livery, and whose papers were in the charge of an unliveried servant who waited within his master's call. Four-forty! The impatient traveller glanced again at the station clock, and, discrediting it, consulted his own watch; then he

turned into the telegraph office, and, drawing a printed form before him, dipped his pen into the ink and wrote—

“Robert Monkton Western Junction to Scot
Monkton Grosvenor Place 4.40 and the mail
not in Due at 4.0 Confound it Don't send
to meet me These laggard trains are never to
be relied on ”

The ink was exhausted, as well as the matter in hand. Slowly, as if he would have liked to think of something to add, to employ another minute of this waiting time, Squire Monkton raised his eyes and looked round the office, listening the while for the tokens of an approaching train, while his eyes fell idly on a young man who, standing near, was himself penning a telegram. Gradually, and because he had nothing to do, the Squire allowed his interest to become lazily centred in this young man. He was sickly—that fact was betrayed equally by his thin hands and the heavy comforter he wore this Spring afternoon; and he was poor—that fact was betrayed equally by his threadbare coat and the intense and concentrated anxiety with which he counted and re-counted the words in his telegram, as if

it were difficult, though necessary, to keep within the twenty. Poor and weak, hard-worked and tired, perhaps; yet scarcely more than Scot's age. And then to picture Scot! At that very moment, most likely, driving his four beautiful sorrels in Rotten Row, his the very finest turn-out—horses, drag, and servants, altogether—in the park, and he certainly one of the finest young fellows, as well as the best whip. Such a favourite too! Was any other father ever made so proud by the glances bestowed upon his son, or the words of praise lavished upon him?—and—— But what had led him into this long mental glance at Scot? Nothing, after all, but a practical glance at that lank young figure in the black suit, still poring over the written message, and still nervously trying to compress what he needed to say.

“What a pity,” ruminated the Squire, “to be obliged to look so hard at a sixpence, before you can part with it! It's a new experience. I never imagined that anyone counted the words in a telegram, except the clerk who is put here to do it.”

“Will you tell me if ‘post-office’ would be called two words?”

The Squire's attention had been sufficiently excited to induce him to wait and listen, when the young man raised his head to ask this question of the telegraph clerk. Even before the words were all uttered, his pleasant, kindly eyes had filled with a keen intentness which was quite new to them.

The clerk answered, and the young man bent to his writing again; but the Squire's telegram lay unfinished, and he stood waiting still, and, to all appearance, listening still. He fancied he had waited a long hour so, when the young man at last rose to an upright posture, and, raising his hat for a few moments, drew a small cotton handkerchief across his forehead. The fingers of the Squire's left hand, which lay upon his telegram, closed and opened again with a convulsive spasm, but he did not move from his leaning attitude; though when at last the clerk asked if he had completed his message, he turned and answered, with a laugh, that he supposed he had said sufficient.

"One-and-sixpence, sir."

The Squire put down a half-sovereign.

"I cannot wait for the change," he said, speaking genially to the young man beside

him. "Will you oblige me by allowing the clerk to consider that that half-sovereign pays for your telegram too? There's my train. Telegrams are great nuisances, aren't they?" And he left the office before the young man could answer.

Deep in thought, and apparently as uncomfortable as if he were conscious of a mean action, Mr. Monkton sauntered along the platform, until the long-expected train entered the station at last, and his valet, knowing how impatient he had been, hurried up to him.

"Put the things in," said the Squire, composedly, while his eyes wandered beyond his servant's face, keenly and watchfully; "there's no hurry."

He was passing a second-class carriage as he spoke, and suddenly he paused, taking out his pocket-book and pretending to examine the papers it contained; while his valet walked on, without seeing a young man advance to the door of this second-class carriage.

"The train has arrived at last," said Squire Monkton, cheerily, though still with that observant look into the sickly face. "Just look at that clock. Four-forty-nine, isn't it? I

shall write to the *Times* about this ; and, as I've called your attention to the hour, and may have occasion to call a witness to the irregularity, would you oblige me with your card ?”

Only those who knew Robert Monkton's usual easy tones could have detected the suppressed anxiety of the present ones ; and the young man, guessing nothing of this, answered—without a thought beyond the words—that he had no card, and (with the colour rising in his worn face) that no testimony of his would be of any value.

“Are you going on to town ?” asked the Squire, just as if the voice of this stranger enthralled him, while his eyes were riveted upon his face.

“No, sir,” the young man answered, with hardly any appearance of surprise ; “only as far as Redley.”

“Oh !”

Then Mr. Monkton was summoned hurriedly to his place—the dilatory train might have had a notion of making up for lost time—and his servants, expressing mutual surprise at their master's conduct, took their seats together in a second-class carriage. As the train left the

station, he leaned forward from his corner, to address a man who had entered the carriage after him, and was his only companion."

"Will you tell me what time this train reaches Redley?"

"You'd better look in *Bradshaw*," was the polite retort.

"Unfortunately," said the Squire, in his courteous way, "I have no *Bradshaw* with me."

No answer, and the train rolled on to its next stopping place, when Mr. Monkton's valet appeared at the door of the carriage, and, touching his hat, asked if his master wanted anything.

"Yes," was the testy reply; "send James to ask what time this train reaches Redley, and how long it stops there."

"The train reaches Redley at 8.10, sir," said the footman, a minute afterwards, "and stays three or four minutes."

The Squire settled himself back in his corner, his papers unopened, and the very presence of his companion forgotten.

Since the appearance of the servants, though, this companion had felt more inclined to con-

tinue the conversation he had nipped so suddenly; but now the Squire showed no inclination for even a word. Once he roused himself suddenly, looked at his watch, and then took up a paper and folded it to read. But in a few moments it dropped upon his knee again, and he was once more buried in thought.

"We shall be at Redley now in twenty minutes' time," remarked the Squire's companion, trying again to break the long hours of silence as they sped on through the silent twilight landscape. "We've done a good deal towards making up for lost time. Our pace is a good five-and-forty miles an hour."

The Squire nodded thoughtfully.

"Thanks," he said; "but I'm going on to London."

"I know this incline well; and a rather sharp one it is," continued the man, as he took off his hat and put his head through the window. "Hallo! Are they trying to slacken speed here? Is it—By Heaven, there's something wrong!"

He came over to the Squire's window, and leaned from it; savagely, but quite unconsciously, pushing back Mr. Monkton as he did so.

From this window he could see for some little distance along the double line of rails down the curve, and in one moment he must have seen what awaited them. White as death, he staggered back, and threw himself at full length upon the floor of the carriage.

Half bewildered, in this waking from his long meditation, the Squire rose and looked out into the twilight. On the second line of rails, and a little in advance, stood, or seemed to stand, an engine and tender; and through the steam which poured from the funnel in the sudden slackening of speed, could be plainly seen a man upon the step of the engine, waving his arm with that frantic gesture of warning which is always so terribly freighted with despair.

But the watching eyes saw more than this. Directly in front of the passenger train as it rolled smoothly on—and only a few yards away, now that the curve in the incline had revealed it—a row of empty waggons lay, overturned across the line along which sped the passenger train.

After a few moments, the engine of the London mail was, with one horrible shock, turned aside.

Breaking loose, it dashed up the embankment, paused one moment like a rearing horse, and then fell backwards on the carriages.

CHAPTER IV.

JUST beyond reach of the dust which flies from Richmond bridge on Summer days, a large red house stood on the bank above the river. The ivy clustered round its low windows, and Father Thames, in his brightest mood, kissed its lawn as he went past. The room behind those two long windows in the centre, was called the school-room still, though, of the seven little heads that used to bend above their lessons there, six were lying under the walls of the church behind the house, and the one remaining was a man's head, grave and thoughtful. But to him, even yet, the old schoolroom was a favourite retreat, as there he could be safe from interruption in his one pet pursuit; and on that Saturday afternoon he was following it with all his heart and soul,

though not alone in the old schoolroom to-day.

This pleasant house at Richmond was the home of a shrewd and well-known London solicitor, who, through all his home bereavements, had passed his life between his offices in Gray's Inn Square and this old Richmond house. The name upon those office doors had never been altered since two young brothers, starting in life, themselves watched it painted, in proud and happy anticipation of that wealthy harvest which only one was to be left to reap. And clients to whom this double name, "T. & C. Bradford," had become as familiar as the dial on the chapel opposite, had by degrees grown staunch in the belief that the lawyer who was ever alone in the office had been the elder of the brothers. But there was a legend in the Inns of Court that once a client, in an evil spirit of curiosity—for who could need sounder advice than Mr. Bradford was willing to give them?—had been led into a reference to the second initial on the door, and begged Mr. Bradford "to consult his brother Charles."

"Sir," remarked the lawyer, composedly, "*I* am my brother Charles."

And there were schoolfellows of Kenneth Bradford's who asserted that even *he* did not know to which initial his father laid greater claim, as the letters which he received at school always concluded in the well-balanced terms, "Your loving father, T. & C. Bradford."

It was this sole remaining son of Mr. Bradford's who sat in the old schoolroom at Richmond on that Saturday afternoon, deep in his pet pursuit; a young man of five-and-twenty, with a stoop in his tall figure, and a great restlessness, as well as thoughtfulness, in his narrow, intellectual face. With his pen in his hand, and a quantity of loose sheets of MS. on the table before him, he was reading aloud to his companion all that he had written since that last holiday afternoon when he had read her the opening of this wonderful tragedy which, as she firmly believed, was to crown his grave, dark head with undying laurels. She sat opposite him at the table, her elbows resting on it, and her chin buried in her palms; a slight girl, dressed in velveteen, with a bunch of snow-drops at her breast, her bright, fair hair hanging in heavy natural curls, one thick lock from each temple knotted lightly behind; a girl with a

face full of merriment, yet capable of intense tenderness ; a face which, though possessing no positive beauty, was yet winning beyond words in its ever-varying expressions, and the changing lights of sympathy and laughter in its lustrous eyes.

So sat Doris Egerton upon that holiday Saturday, listening while Kenneth read.

“Entombed ! with life all warm about her heart.
Entombed ! in darkness which no sun can pierce.
The weight of night for ever on those eyes
Which have been stars to me——”

“But, Ken,” interrupted Doris, her eyes a little wider than usual, “isn’t that very jerky language for a king’s son?”

“I will improve it,” said Kenneth, promptly dipping his pen into the ink. “What do you suggest, Doris?”

“Oh ! pass it on and read more,” cried Doris, the very impersonation of eager attention. “You can think of improvement afterwards.”

So Kenneth gravely read on, until another excited interruption burst from his solitary listener. He looked up anxiously to read its cause, and smiled with pleasure to find that she

had stopped him only to give vent to an exclamation of pride and delight.

"Ken, that's beautiful! It is not a bit like real life, of course, but then that oughtn't to be in a tragedy, ought it?"

"There is a real life of tragedy as well as of comedy, dear; it should be true to that."

"Then you must alter the whole play from the beginning," observed Doris, cheerfully. "But you can do that afterwards; go on now, please."

Another scene was read through, and then Doris raised her head from her hands, and shook it gravely.

"That won't do, Kenneth; you mustn't let him live. Everybody dies in a tragedy—generally on each other's graves."

"They all die here, except Creon," explained Kenneth, anxiously; "and Hemo *does* kill himself on Antigone's grave."

"That's right," said Doris, with evident relief; "then it will be a great tragedy. Go on."

Another reading, and then it was Kenneth who made the interruption.

"Doris, you know this speech of Antigone's when she hears her sentence—you learnt it

long ago ; it was one of the first bits I wrote— I wish you would repeat it, and act it just as you think it should be acted.”

“All right,” said Doris, rising promptly. “Sentence me to be buried alive, that I may realise my position !”

So Kenneth pronounced sentence upon Doris, while she listened with her brows drawn, so intently following every word upon his lips that the cry which broke from hers, when they were all uttered, made Kenneth start with a sudden shock. The cry broke into a laugh.

“Did you think it was reality, Ken ?” she asked. “Why, I thought that was very tragic, and that you’d be so pleased.”

“I was startled for the moment,” said Kenneth, sorry now that he had interrupted her ; “you did it too well.”

“I didn’t know that a part *could* be acted too well,” rejoined Doris, quietly. “Ken, I expect I shall be very proud of you when a great burst of applause all over the theatre shows that *Antigone* has been a triumph, and that its author has won his laurels.”

“But the applause may mean very little,” said Kenneth, thoughtfully, “and it may greet

my play on its first night, yet leave me quite unsatisfied in my desire for fame. Let me tell you how I dream of my first night, Doris. There is no noise among the people, but the sorrow and the passion I have drawn find echoes in their hearts, and the love and truth touch some answering chord. Ah, Doris, just one sob in the breathless hush ; just one breath of glad relief when the sorrow turns to joy ; just one token that the hearts among the audience answer to the passion on the stage—that I call fame. And I lie awake at night, and wonder when such fame as this will make my life complete.”

“I can imagine it,” said Doris, softly ; “but, Kenneth, I have heard of men of genius who have wasted their lives in the pursuit of such fame as this ; and I think you would be happier perhaps if you could enjoy yourself more in a general sort of way, as I do, and if you were not so clever, and so terribly sensitive.”

“But, Doris, do you think any fame which my writing could bring would satisfy me unless you shared it?”

“And when that triumphant first night is over,” remarked Doris, closing her ears to that

last speech, "what form will fame take in the future?"

"After that night," said Kenneth, very quietly, "none of my dreams go on."

"Listen, Ken. Your chance of fame depends quite as much upon your actors as upon yourself. Don't let there be raving, but, in the height of his passion, let Hemo speak quite low, as if he would not let his passion all be roused—oh, you know what I mean! Now you recite Hemo's last words."

"Stop!" she cried, interrupting him presently, with a curious look of pain upon her face. Then she threw back her head and smiled. "It was so sad, Ken; it seemed real, even without the dress."

"Does it need dress, then, to portray intense and powerful thought? Did not that one subtle action of yours (with the cry) mislead me too?"

"Should not we two," said Doris, her eyes full of laughter, "be brilliant stars upon the British stage, Ken—if you could be my public, and I could be yours?"

"Doris"—she was kneeling on a chair before the fire (for Kenneth liked a fire even when

the sun was shining and the windows were open), and as he spoke he laid his hand softly on her hair—"no praise from the widest public in the world would content me, unless you were proud and content too."

"But your public wouldn't applaud and flatter me, Ken. Why should I be pleased about it?" the girl asked, demurely.

"Doris," he cried, and he closed his fingers on the hands which she had locked upon the back of the chair on which she knelt, "you know what I mean; you know that I can bear to think of no future for myself which you do not share."

"It's a future a very long way off, then, is it?"

"I am five-and-twenty," he said, in his quiet tones, "and you are eighteen now. Need I wait very long, Doris? I mean, of course, after I have won myself a name of which you may be proud."

"I don't care about that," returned Doris, her grave eyes looking straight before her into the depths of the fire. "If one loves a person, I think one must love him almost better when the world is not exactly lying at his feet—per-

haps even all the better if the world treads him under *its* feet."

"A natural fancy for a generous and romantic child," said Kenneth, with his grave, slow smile. "But you surely can see the other side as plainly?"

But Doris shook her head; it was a subject about which she understood so little on that Spring afternoon.

"Well and dearly as I love you, Doris, I shall not ask you to take a name which may be blotted with failure, or over which men may smile compassionately, recalling a poor dupe, who was a fancied poet. But," he urged, the warm colour rising for a moment in his sallow cheeks, "you will promise that, with my success, I may win my wife. Make me the promise, darling; just think then of the joy for me of that first night of my tragedy. But you can hardly understand it, dear—I think no woman could; it seems sometimes as if even a man's heart could not hold it."

"Perhaps we women have hearts as big as men's, Ken," observed Doris, frankly meeting his dreamy gaze; "but perhaps we are more given to think of only one thing at a time."

"Make me the promise, Doris," persisted the young man, earnestly; "let me have that, as I am losing your dear face and voice."

"Shall you never come to see us at Kingswood, then?"

"I should come to the world's end to see you; but think how hard I shall work with this end in view. Is the promise given, Doris, which I may claim on that first night, when I stand on the pinnacle of success? Doris, darling, are you cold?"

"I suppose so. Just at that moment I shivered, didn't I?"

"And the promise is mine?" he asked. "My little friend and dear companion will be my wife at last?"

"Kenneth, I must live a long time with papa first," she said, her eyes again upon the fire. "We have been separated for seven years. You must not win your laurels too soon."

Kenneth knelt upon the rug, and when his face met hers she could see the joy that filled his eyes.

"Darling," he said, "I know this is a promise you will never break. When my first tragedy is pronounced a success, I may remind you that you are mine?"

"As well as the laurels," smiled Doris. But she rose rather wearily as she spoke, and drew her hand—though very gently—from Kenneth's.

This promise, once given, was very binding and sacred in the girl's eyes ; but then Kenneth's success might be a long way off, and somehow the thought of it all was very vague. So it happened that she turned with a sigh of unconscious relief when the door was opened, and a servant announced "Mr. Monkton."

"Excuse me for this interruption, Bradford," said Scot Monkton, as Kenneth came forward and took his offered hand ; "but it was your father I came to see. I suppose he is so seldom sought at home here, that your servant could only imagine I meant you. I"—Scot was going to say he was afraid he had intruded, but the speech, at best, is but an ill-chosen one, and Scot had the tact to correct it in time—"I was told at the office that Mr. Bradford was at home to-day—an unusual thing for him."

"Very," smiled Kenneth ; "he was not well enough to go to town this morning, having a touch of gout ; but I'm sure he will see you. Doris," he added, taking her hand as she stood on the rug, her face turned from them, "will

you let me introduce Mr. Monkton? Miss Egerton, Mr. Monkton."

A demure as well as graceful curtsy was Doris's, yet she could, by a strategic movement essentially feminine, take note exactly how Mr. Monkton performed his part. The girl's curiosity was natural, for this was the Mr. Monkton on whose estate she was going to live, and whose name stared at her from so many of the boxes in Mr. Bradford's offices when she went there with her aunt Joan; the Mr. Monkton whom Kenneth had sometimes pointed out to her, as he drove or rode past them when they walked together, on Summer afternoons under the trees in Hyde Park.

But Scot, highly satisfactory as his deferential bow had been to his critical little *vis-à-vis*, seemed by no means inclined to stand on any lofty, imaginary pedestal. In his genial way—ever so courteous, though its ease might have been mistaken, as Monsieur Sourdets had mistaken it a few days ago, for inherent idleness—he fell coolly and comfortably into conversation, equally with Kenneth, whom, as the son of his father's solicitor, he had always known, and with the sunny-haired girl with the shy, bright eyes and the merry, mobile lips.

"My father will be in London to-night," said Scot, addressing Kenneth, "and, as I know he wishes to see Mr. Bradford, I thought perhaps I might persuade him to come back and dine with us."

"I will ask him," said Kenneth, but, as he moved to the door, Scot coolly detained him.

"No; please say nothing to him. I would not think of it, as he has his old enemy with him. What are those valuable sheets, Bradford? Another drama?"

"A tragedy this time," said Doris, with a proud glance at Kenneth, as she gathered the loose pages together with a pretty air of proprietorship; "a beautiful tragedy, Mr. Monkton, called *Antigone*."

"Another!" echoed Scot, his eyes following the girl's deft fingers. "What has become of all the rest, Bradford? Are they accepted?"

The colour mounted hotly into Kenneth's face.

"No," he said, honestly; "I have never had one accepted yet."

"You see, when once he gets a play accepted, Mr. Monkton," said Doris, brightly, "and people

see that he is a genius, all those rejected manuscripts will become valuable in a moment."

"I see that you understand it thoroughly," said Scot, looking laughingly into her eyes; "but remember how his father's heart is set on his devoting himself to the law. I suppose this occupation tempts you on, Bradford?"

"Yes. Often I ask myself if it be worth while," said Kenneth, laying his hand for a moment on his forehead; "and then the old passion masters me, and I must go on. Possibly it will lead to poverty—don't they say poverty is the inevitable fate of literary men?—still I cannot turn aside."

"It's a glorious thing to be a poet, Mr. Monkton, isn't it?" asked Doris, turning to question him in pretty earnestness.

"It is a glorious thing, too," replied Scot, simply, "to follow the straight and unromantic line of duty."

Doris quietly turned again to her work of collecting the sheets of manuscript, but Kenneth answered that Mr. Monkton of course could not understand a man's being engrossed by one pursuit.

"Yet, were I myself left penniless to-morrow,"

said Scot, with a laugh, "I could only earn a sixpence by appealing to the benevolent in the streets, in a napless hat and a shining swallow-tail, performing 'The Vagabond' on my cornet."

In the midst of Doris's merry laugh, the school-room door was opened to admit a bright-looking old lady, followed closely by a servant with a tea-tray. This old lady was Mr. Bradford's cousin, as well as cousin to Doris's father, but by both Kenneth and Doris she was invariably called "Aunt Joan." It was in her charge that Colonel Egerton had left his little girl, and it was from her he would claim her in a few weeks' time, with no fear that the education he had provided for his daughter would be vain or superficial. How "Aunt Joan" had fulfilled her trust could only be told as the years went on; but, whenever she mused on the time when she should give the child back to her father, there was a placid trust within her heart, as if she felt no fear.

"I have sat so long in my cousin's room," she said, as she shook hands with Scot Monkton, whom she had met before, "that I am glad to have a little change; so I have ordered the tea to be brought here. Ah! Kenneth," she added,

as her eyes fell on the loose sheets in Doris's hands, "at your old hobby! Just because a splendid profession is ready to your hand, you must choose something else to put your hand to! And you so thoroughly imbue Doris with your romantic notions, that I declare I shall leave off bringing her here on her holidays."

"No," said Kenneth, quietly; "they will so soon be over."

"And when they are, I dare say you will settle down into as sensible a lawyer as your father is. A man should always be true to his intended profession."

"When Johnson and Garrick first came to London to start in the world, Miss Bradford," said Scot, rather intently watching Doris as she put the manuscript into Kenneth's hand with a smile of bright encouragement, "I believe it was Garrick's intention, and the burly Doctor's great ambition, to go in for law; yet fate led them otherwise. And could we more easily have spared our great tragedian and our literary lion than two extra lawyers?"

"Don't excuse him, please, Mr. Monkton," said Miss Bradford, trying to put a little sternness into her kind grey eyes. "I could excuse

him if he were dull of comprehension in any way."

"Then cheer up, Miss Bradford, for he is not a genius," put in Scot, as he slowly took his tea from Doris, with a smile into her eyes. "Genius is always dull of comprehension save in one particular strong point. Do you remember how Sheridan's mother said he was the dullest and most hopeless of all her children?"

"And Goldsmith never wrote till he was thirty, did he?" added Doris, still standing beside Scot, with a strange, soothing quietness in her very proximity, of which he was conscious even then.

"Miss Egerton, shall you and I make an agreement to remind Kenneth, when he reaches the pinnacle of fame, that we foresaw it?"

"And be the first to take his hand in congratulation," added Doris, nodding her bright head at Kenneth.

They were but light and careless words of kind encouragement, yet neither of those who uttered them could recall them, in the after-time, without a pang of keenest sorrow.

"It was not until Scot Monkton had been to

Mr. Bradford's room, and had returned to take leave of the ladies, that Doris suddenly began to question him about the home to which, in a few weeks' time, her father was to take her.

"It is close to you, Mr. Monkton, is it not?"

"Not very close," returned Scot, delaying his departure with no apparent unwillingness. "I wish it were nearer. It is on the very outskirts of the park."

"Is it nice? What is it like?" questioned Doris, with the childlike eagerness which alternated, in a puzzling manner, with her fits of womanly gravity.

"It is awfully solitary, and grim, and cold, and gloomy—at present."

"But," persisted Doris, defying the blush which made her so angry with herself, "I mean, what will it be like when we—when it is furnished?"

"What will it be like when you are there, you say?" echoed Scot, in his lowest, laziest tones, while he pretended to be recalling a mental picture. "Not solitary—nor grim—nor cold—nor gloomy. Can you picture the very opposite?"

"Is it? Oh, I'm so glad!" said Doris,

simply. "And Kingswood? But I know all about Kingswood," she added, seeing even in that moment the great love he bore his home. "I know how beautiful that is. Who else will live near us, Mr. Monkton?"

"At Comely Place, very near to you, I hope you will have a friend in Miss Chamberlain."

"She!" exclaimed Doris, with a sudden passion in her voice and eyes. "She shall never be my friend. I am very sorry she will live near to us."

"Still nearer to your house," continued Scot, as the swift glance of anger died out of his eyes, "there is another house, not occupied now, but it may be some day; a really grim and desolate place; an old farmhouse full of weird sounds and real and *bonâ fide* ghosts, with an endless catalogue of legends attached to it. In one fearful spot near it——"

"Oh, stop!" cried Doris, half in real distress, and half in doubt. "You are laughing at me, Mr. Monkton. What is this ugly farm called?"

"The Black Birches. It is not ugly."

"Who owns it?"

"I do. It is the only spot in the world which belongs to me."

"But Kingswood?"

"Is my father's, Miss Egerton," put in Scot, quietly. "The Black Birches, strange to say, was left to me when I was a little lad, by an old fellow who thought it ought to form part of the Kingswood estate, but in whose family it had been for centuries. I have generally had tenants there, but at present it is vacant."

Mr. Monkton's tandem had been standing for some time upon the gravel sweep, and now he suddenly became aware of the fact, and gave his hand to Miss Bradford and to Doris.

"Then, in a few weeks' time," he said, addressing both, "I may have the pleasure of greeting you in the Kingswood Dower House?"

"Only Doris, I think," replied Miss Joan, with a caressing touch upon the girl's shoulder. "Father and daughter will be sufficient to each other; but of course I shall go to see them very often."

"Thank you, Aunt Joan; I know you understand best."

The words sounded so childlike, in their utter reliance on the elder lady's judgment, that Scot caught himself wondering how the girl, brought up under such a sheltering wing, would bear

the transplanting into a large house, the care of which would rest upon her young head.

"I shall see," he thought to himself. And then he said good-bye, and went.

"Doris, are you tired?" Kenneth had returned to the schoolroom after Mr. Monkton's departure, and found her alone, standing at the window, her fingers trifling gently with the snowdrops in her dress, and her eyes far off upon the flowing river. "Are you tired, dear?"

"Tired!" she echoed; and in one moment her eyes had their old brilliance. "What could have tired me?"

"*Antigone*," he answered, almost sadly, "and my long, prosy dreams."

"Dear Ken," she cried, her face all full of bright encouragement, "*Antigone* never tires me; nor do you—ever. How could you think it—you, my teacher in everything that's good and patient and trustful, and my—my *one* true old friend and companion? Oh, Kenneth, never say that again, please."

The eager impetuosity was so natural to Doris that it touched no unsuspected note of doubt in Kenneth's mind.

"Now Aunt Joan will be ready," she said, turning from the window.

"Don't shorten the evening, Doris," he pleaded, gently detaining her. "We have so few more happy Saturdays to spend together. But I will not mind," he went on, more cheerfully; "each Saturday will bring us nearer to our marriage, won't it, dear?"

"We are both so busy just now," said Doris, with a shake of her head, while the brightness of her voice contrasted strangely with his anxious and even diffident tones, "that we have really no time to think of marriage. How oddly the word sounded from you, Kenneth!"

"No wonder," said Kenneth, quietly. "It is the end for which I work."

"A mistake," put in the girl, her eyes and lips both laughing. "'*She* sighed for love, and *he* for glory.' Don't reverse the ancient order."

"Doris," he said, in anxious earnestness, "I'm sure you do not misunderstand my love for my art. Overmastering as it is, you know that it is a feeling apart from my love for you—don't you?"

"Yes," she said; but her answer was very low, for her heart was chilled by a vague fear, which she was trying to combat.

"And you feel that, in following this pursuit.

I am led on by something which—I think—must be power?”

“Yes.”

“Thank you, Doris,” he said, in a tone of real relief. “Even when I am sitting in my father’s office, and trying hard to fit myself into the life he wishes for me, this power drags me beyond the boundaries of law-books, into that poet-world from which I believe I draw my very life-breath.”

“Hush, Kenneth, please!” said Doris, gently. “Let us go. That—that simple line of duty which Mr. Monkton spoke of, is sometimes so hard to see.”

“I never see it,” rejoined Kenneth, drawing his hand slowly across his forehead, as he had a habit of doing. “All before me is chaos, except that always one bright spot shines in the distance. You understand, my darling?”

“Yes.”

CHAPTER V.

A LONG that pleasant road which, from the western suburbs, runs due east to London, Scot Monkton's tandem rolled swiftly; the horses' heads in a line, the eyes of their driver intent and careful, while yet his thoughts were laggard, and did not hurry with him from the ivy-covered house at Richmond. Through Turnham Green, then down the long and narrow street at Hammersmith, where the crowd—pushing and noisy, and engrossed in its Saturday purchases—never turned their heads to look after him. On again, along the wide west road, through Kensington to Prince's Gate, joining then the world of lavish wealth and idle fashion; the beautiful and brilliant world, scarcely out of sight of that Hammersmith street where the crowd jostled too, but looked less upon each other's faces than upon

the few shillings that were left them for the week's food and lodging, and where, when a woman's eyes *did* seek one face among the crowd, it was in fear and pain, and in the knowledge that, however debased and disfigured it might be, she must not shrink from it—Ah, never *she*, or who in all the world would see a man's soul beneath this brute ferocity or helplessness?

On through this crowded thoroughfare, and now hundreds of eyes followed Scot's firm, easy figure, and women's lips broke into smiles as he came up; though in no one instance did he give more than a passing greeting as he drove steadily on. Twice he drove up the beaten track, turning at the Marble Arch; then daintily and lightly the tandem ran out into Piccadilly, and Scot Monkton, as he drew up at his club, congratulated himself coolly on having made up for lost time.

"He always wants to know who's in town," Scot meditated, his father being understood by the "he," "and now I shall have a fair idea; yet I shall be in good time too."

"Monkton! Capital! I didn't know you were in town."

“Join us to-night, Monkton ; you are just the man we want.”

“That’s right, Monkton ; it’s jolly to see you. We began to think you were not coming this month, and we miss you awfully, old fellow !”

Heartily returning the handshakes, and coolly parrying the flattering greetings, Scot stood among the group, not the handsomest nor the tallest, but, by virtue of something—who could tell yet what was that latent power below the cordial words and laughing glances ?—distinguished among them all.

“Impossible,” he returned, composedly, to all their invitations or proposals ; “I must stay at home to-night.”

“But surely you’ll be at the Opera ?”

“No, nowhere to-night, so leave off tempting me. How many of you will breakfast with us to-morrow at Grosvenor Place ? We are but bachelors, remember.”

They stood together for nearly an hour, a handsome, merry group, in the large bow window, their words and laughter prompt and gay. And when at last Scot took his thorough-breds in hand again, one of the young men, looking quizzically after him, said he had not

thought that another season would have found Monkton still debonair and heart-whole.

"He won't succumb in a hurry," remarked the Club cynic; "he's a plucky, pleasant fellow, but he's most emphatically a vertebrate animal, I can tell you"—a speech of which his listeners understood the half only.

When he reached home Scot found a telegram awaiting him, and he opened it with a smile, because the Squire, in his genial, restless way had such a mania for telegraphing to his son when they were apart. Scot's smile broke into a laugh when he read the message.

"4 40 and the mail not in Due at 4 0 Confound it Don't send to meet me These laggard trains are never to be relied on"

"Then he may be an hour late," thought Scot, as he threw the paper into the grate; "I must have the dinner kept back, though I don't suppose that was the Squire's motive in his message."

But the dinner, even though put back, was kept waiting minute after minute.

"It is after ten, sir; will you wait longer?"

"Certainly." Scot, in his evening dress, had paced the lighted rooms, and dipped into the

magazines, and now, in an unused drawing-room, where the light necessary for him only revealed the shrouded furniture, he sat cheerfully at the open piano, improvising an accompaniment to *Di Pescatore*, as he whistled the air with the greatest correctness and purity. "Certainly, wait; and light up the house as much as you can."

"Shall I prepare these apartments then, sir——"

"Oh! nonsense, we don't want these rooms," said Scot, experimentalizing upon a new chord; "but light up all the others; and you may as well send some one to the station, to see if the train is in. Tell Artaud to take a hansom, and go himself as quickly as he can."

"I know," he smiled to himself, as the butler closed the door upon him in the dim room, "that the Squire's idea will be to write to the *Times* of this delay."

"Perhaps, sir," said Artaud, entering a few minutes afterwards, "this second telegram will prevent the necessity of my going. It has just arrived."

Scot whistled on to the end of the phrase, while he raised his hands from the keys and took

the envelope. What could his father have found to telegraph about, between Western Junction and London? Still whistling, more softly now, he rose from his seat and stood under the gas. Many a time afterwards Artaud recalled that picture, as, when the ship is tossing out at sea, one recalls the last peaceful glimpse of the shore at home.

"Take it. English as it is, you will see the truth in it as plainly as I do. Call me a cab, while I change these——"

That was all Scot said, as he passed the ugly piece of paper into his servant's hand; but his voice was husky, and when it so suddenly failed, his gaze grew vague and far off—utterly beyond his control, in the great effort he made to hide his strong emotion. And, while his breath quickened as if in shame at being powerless to finish his calm sentence, the fingers of his right hand fumbled nervously with his tie, as if he thought the swelling of his heart could be relieved by loosening that.

The message was so short that Artaud, though he did not pause upon his way, had read it over many times when he reached the hall, and sent to summon a hansom. It was simply

a few words from the Squire's valet, telling that there had been a terrific accident upon the line, eight miles from Redley, and that the company were sending down a special train at once, but—with more tragic meaning than any words could have conveyed—leaving his master's name unwritten.

Before the cab had stopped at the door, Scot was down in the hall, and, while apparently quite unconscious of putting on the overcoat Artaud held for him, he coolly and intelligibly left his orders with the men, who wondered at the change which these few minutes had made in the face which they had always seen so free from care.

From his own door, Scot drove first to the house of a famous physician, who was an old friend of his father's, and who, when Scot had told his story in few words, took the unoccupied seat beside him, and sat in a kind and sympathetic silence, while the horse sped on at its utmost speed.

The special train—a long line of first-class carriages, the purpose of which Dr. Boyd understood only too well, though Scot suspected nothing of it—was ready to start when they

reached the London terminus, and, in a hush which, strange as it was in that place, Scot did not notice, they rushed out into the night, leaving a crowd of pitying, anxious faces upon the platform.

“Monkton,” said the old physician, speaking only just this once, through all that swift, silent journey, and leaning forward, as he did so, to lay his hand on the young man’s shoulder, “I’m a poor hand at teaching patience, and this is an awful time for the lesson ; but just try to say, ‘God’s will be done.’ If you only move your lips to say the words mechanically, the thought will come the easier afterwards.”

“A bat !” said Scot, looking from the carriage window out into the darkness. “I thought I heard him ; one cannot mistake their short, quick cry. Did you ever notice it ?”

The physician did not answer. Even *his* skill sought in vain a palliative for this new mask of self-control, for which he had been unprepared in Scot Monkton.

“There’s an old farm near Kingswood,” continued Scot, turning his eyes slowly back from the window—“the Black Birches, they call it,—and I never saw anything like the way

the bats love it; I always noticed it, even as a child—always. You don't know the Black Birches? I must show you over the grim old spot some day, if you will let me."

And this was all they said to each other during that swift journey through the darkness; and when the train stopped at last, for the first as well as the last time, Scot was first of all the passengers to alight.

They had sped through Redley station and stopped upon the line, in a scene of havoc and torture which must have made the atmosphere awful even in dense darkness, but which now, in the lurid glare shed by the pile of burning wood fed from the broken carriages, was terrible beyond description. Standing apart for a few moments on the line, the strong light on his bare head, and his hand upon his burning brow, Scot looked down upon the terrible devastation, and a strong shiver seized him when the red pools among the broken fragments told him their own horrible tale.

But it was only for a few moments that Scot stood so—stunned in this first coming face to face with an agony which was so great and deep, and yet of which the whole immensity

was *his*. His fellow-passengers, shrieking and sobbing, and piteously calling names to which no answers came, rushed past him in their fearful search. A group of men near him—gentlemen and labouring men, working together quickly and silently with one brave aim, and with a strength and power that were equal in this great need,—lifted the heavy masses of wood and iron piled in one spot. Through the sweeping of the flame, and the shriller cries, Scot heard their words, and started forward, his brain reeling, and a fire coursing through his veins, but his arms the strongest there, and sure and true in all his frantic haste.

“Heaven pity her !”

For a few seconds the men stood back ; their work was finished, and, in the light of the flame above them, there lay a crushed and mangled form, and a face upturned to the firelit sky which even a mother's eyes could not have recognised.

Scot, bent above it, his stained hands shading his searching eyes, but suddenly he rose upright with a swift excitement which, in a moment, gave him his old vigour.

"Mr. Monkton—here, sir; it was I who called you."

Never could Scot afterwards realise the relief of that moment, in which he recognised the voice of his father's servant, because it lasted *but* a moment, and the after-misery followed so soon.

Following the man's lead, and with Doctor Boyd beside him, Scot crossed the line, among the engrossed and hurrying figures. Close beside them, propped on coats and rugs against the bank, an old man, too near death to bear removal, was making his will in proper legal form—for it seemed that help in every case was near and prompt to-night. Past them slowly moved a little procession, bearing one of those who were to be taken on in the waiting train, provided now with beds and blankets; while a group of hospital nurses, with a matron at their head, silently and deftly prepared the wounded for their journey.

But, when Scot had passed the broken carriages, treading with difficulty, and was walking on under the embankment to the roadside station on the top of the incline, in spite of his hurrying steps he heard all that was said beside

him, when the old physician had inquired into the cause of this great accident. Only afterwards did he *know* that he had heard and understood every word. At the time he thought he was counting the steps that lay between them and the little building in front of them, lighted more weirdly by the blaze of the huge fire than by the lamps which they saw moving restlessly about it. At the time he was wondering whence had sprung so suddenly, in this great need, the gentle, brave physicians whom he saw at work; the earnest ministers who knelt beside the dying, and, while whispering the sweet familiar promises, did not forget to ease, by kindly deeds, this one quick step into the life to come; and the directors who, with their prompt, efficient staff, relieved the terrified as well as the injured, and aided the sorrowing mourners in their bitter search. Afterwards he could tell how he had heard that the axle of one of the waggons of a goods train, bound in the opposite direction to the London mail, had broken, and that this had separated some of the waggons from the train, and thrown them on the up-line, just one minute before the mail was to have passed; that the engine-driver of the goods train—

his engine and tender detached, but still upon its own line—had made wild efforts to stop the passing train, but, as he had only that one minute of time, and the curve in the line had concealed the danger until half that time was spent, these efforts had of course been fruitless. There was not a shade of either moral or legal responsibility for the dreadful consequences, as the crack in the axle had been concealed by the wheel, and never could have been discovered without taking that off; while the wheels had been examined at every station in which the train had stopped. All this Scot knew afterwards that he had heard, while with his companions he walked and ran between the high embankments, thinking that he was aware of nothing beyond the scene around him. Almost more horrible still was that scene when he reached the little station, and passed the guarded door behind which the dead lay waiting to be claimed.

“Not here, Monkton. Thank Heaven, not here!”

Doctor Boyd had seen the awful look upon Scot's face as he paused beside the door, and he hastened forward, and drew his arm within his.

A few minutes afterwards they reached the station-master's private dwelling-rooms, and passing through the disordered kitchen, entered the little sitting-room beyond.

Small as it was, the candle burning in one corner did but feebly light it, and so it was natural, perhaps, that in the first few moments Scot should not recognize his father's face. But, when he knelt beside the mattress on the floor, and tried to smile into the feverish eyes which, from the moment of his entrance, had fastened themselves upon his face with one eager wordless question burning in their depths (as if the life which had throbbed this morning in every vein had left the strong form weak and helpless now, and had gathered all its strength and vigour there), a tide of dull despair swept over him, which showed him that, through all his horrible journey, hope had been with him—until now.

A young surgeon, who stood mixing some medicine beside the candle at the little table, had turned to give a warning glance at Scot; but Doctor Boyd intercepted the glance, and answered, in a whisper—

“Father and son—an only child and only parent.”

Then, standing apart a little, the two medical men consulted together in low tones, after which Doctor Boyd took up his right position beside his dying friend, and, with intense and quiet thoughtfulness, brought his great skill to bear upon the case. But the wide experience of forty years could show him no steps to take, which the young surgeon had not taken before ; and the skill of both was as useless in that room of death as was the cordial which the nurse, stepping so softly, held to the fevered lips.

Not one word had Mr. Monkton attempted to utter since they had brought him into this room ; yet now, with one spasmodic effort, his son's name passed his lips.

"Will you," said Scot, looking sadly up into the watching faces, as he closed his fingers gently on his father's helpless right hand, as if to show him that he understood that ardent gaze which said so much, yet told so little, "leave us for a few moments ? My father has something to say to me alone."

The young surgeon looked anxious and troubled, but Doctor Boyd, signing to the nurse and valet to follow, led the way from the room.

"Pardon me," he said, addressing the surgeon

when they had entered the kitchen—just as the manager of the line, summoned here direct from his box at Drury Lane, came in to them with a little unconscious burden in his arms, his dress boots covered with the torn wet soil, and his white tie stained with one heavy spot of red —“but I am an old friend of Mr. Monkton’s, and, unfortunately, we must both acknowledge that no attempt at speech can make his danger greater than it is at this moment, while it may make the parting a little less bitter for his son. See how sadly you are needed here—yes, I thought so, both the little arms are broken.”

But, for all his thoughtful words, Doctor Boyd could not remain away from his friends, and, before five minutes had passed, he opened the door of the inner room and looked in. As he did so, Scot rose from his knees, and beckoned to him.

“Wait here—alone, please,” he said, and the old physician could hardly recognise the low, hoarse voice; “I will come back quickly.”

“Going?” was the astonished query. “You going?”

But Scot only looked down into his father’s face with one steadfast glance of utter

confidence, and went from the silent room.

Leaving the station-master's house, he passed along the platform until he reached the guarded door of the waiting-room—so truly and so pitifully a waiting-room this night, while the dead lay waiting there for the tears and prayers and kisses of their kindred.

Slowly and reverentially, with head uncovered, Scot moved from one to another of the prostrate forms, and, standing for a little time above each one, he looked down very sadly, as well as searchingly, into the still face from which the light was shaded. Some lay unnoticed, while on other motionless faces rained a shower of bitter tears and passionate kisses.

But not among these, Scot soon knew, was the form his father had bidden him seek among the dead; and, feeling thankful for this, he passed softly from the silent room.

The line had been cleared now, but still the station was crowded, not only with suffering life and silent death, but with mourners, watching sadly, and with strangers who, with prompt and tender help, acted surely no stranger's part just then.

Still with his head uncovered and his face full

of sadness—the handsome face which only a few hours before had looked up from the merry whistling, to meet the message which had brought him here, and had risen like a wide, impenetrable cloud before him, to throw that happy time back into a far-away past, many, many years ago, ah, too many to count while his head was aching so, and this dim night air was heavy with coming misery to so many!—Scot went back.

His father's head was raised when he re-entered the station-master's little sitting-room ; and in Doctor Boyd's expression, as he sat supporting the pillows, Scot read what he understood only too well.

"Hush!" whispered the physician below his breath, as Scot knelt beside his father, his eyes fixed yearningly upon the dying face. "He is scarcely conscious. He has been exerting himself terribly in your absence ; yet how could I deny him what he wanted? A few minutes longer we might have kept him with us ; but every minute is so fraught with suffering and agony that—— He has been waiting for you," Doctor Boyd continued, abruptly breaking off in his first speech, "in a very agony of expectation.

Do you bring him now tidings that will please or pain him? He has written some words to you upon that paper in his hand—very few and unconnected, I know—but he would do it. I—I dared not stay him.” The old physician spoke with tears in his eyes; but Scot’s were dry and burning with fever, almost like those dying ones into which he gazed. “He wrote it brokenly, the strength of his left hand failing after every word. But the message was for your eyes alone, and I had no right to take the pencil from him. He had the candle placed close beside him there; and I feel sure that he waits for the answer you bring him, before he burns that paper—burns it with his own weak hand before another has touched it. Look—he sees you now.”

The low whisper died away, and the physician turned his head aside, for that last parting between father and son was not for his eyes, he knew.

“No, father,” said Scot, very softly, when he read the unuttered question; “not there—not among the dead. No, father,” he repeated, fancying that this answer would bring the dawning of relief upon his father’s face, and too deeply

in sorrow himself to have room for wondering for whom his father could be so anxious.

But, though a change dawned indeed upon the face he watched, it was a far different one from that which he had longed to see. With one moment's flash of power, Mr. Monkton raised his left hand, which had been holding the crushed paper so near the candle, and placed what he had written between Scot's fingers; then, with another spasm of pain, such as had crossed his face on his son's first entrance to him, one word fell tremblingly from his lips.

"Read!"

"I—I am—my eyes, I think—are blind to-night," said Scot, holding the paper tightly within his hand; "but every word that is written here shall be sacred to me, father, through—my life."

A smile, which lived for ever in Scot's memory, lingered for one moment on the suffering lips; and then, softly and almost without pain, the end came.

CHAPTER VI.

AT a small writing-table near the door in his father's office, Kenneth Bradford sat busily employed ; but whether hands and thoughts worked in unison, and whether more engrossed by drafts or dreams, even his father could not judge, though, from his own table between the fire and the window, the old man was scrutinizing him with a good deal of shrewdness—kindly, half-amused shrewdness.

The lad would make a lawyer some day even yet, in spite of his absurd attacks of literary fever and legal coma. Never would he be such an adept in jurisprudence as his father—with a sigh Mr. Bradford acknowledged that fact humbly to himself—but still he would be a respectable and trustworthy member of the firm, exhibiting now and then a flash of unexpected foresight, and laying bare, in the light

of a strong and delicate intellect, some intricate corner in the winding passages of law.

The daylight fell full and clear upon the countless documents lying on Mr. Bradford's writing-table, but it was subdued at the farther end of the room, where Kenneth sat; and down upon his stooping head fell a ray of purple from the small stained window above him. Sometimes, with a certain dry pleasantry which belonged to him, Mr. Bradford would point out to idle or inquisitive clients the two incongruous pieces of adornment which his office contained—this coloured window, and an old painting of Lemens's, of a gaunt, black-haired gentleman on horseback—of course on horseback—and known at a glance to represent England's Orange king. Saying nothing of their rare artistic value (which he was not supposed to appreciate), or of their marketable value (which he *was* supposed to appreciate), he touched only upon their uselessness in the business offices of T. & C. Bradford.

But once or twice, when a *virtuoso* had taken the words in earnest, and, coveting the old works of art, had offered for them any sum the old lawyer would name, his face had as sud-

denly grown grim as it did when once Squire Monkton of Kingswood told him, laughingly, he might add a third to the articles which, valuable though they were, were evidently incongruous in the office—his son.

“Kenneth !”

There was no answer. All the better, while the quill moved on so steadily. Mr. Bradford collected the loose papers on his desk, and docketed them, unhooked his eyeglasses from his long straight nose, and then pushed back his chair ; but it moved on castors, and so made no sound on the thick Turkey carpet.

“Kenneth !”

This time the young man's head was raised in response ; but his thoughts had farther to travel homewards than his eyes, and so had scarcely answered to the summons yet.

“Active, to engross ; passive, to be engrossed. The two voices are having a duet in your case, Kenneth. Look out, lad, or that passive voice will be a perfect Loreley's. And then—why, then shut up the office !”

Evidently reminded by the practical suggestion thrown out in the last four words, Mr. Bradford rose from his chair, glanced at his

watch, and then touched a little hand-bell that stood upon the table.

"Finished that, have you, Kenneth?" he asked, as he walked towards the corner of the office where his hat and gloves always lay when they were not in use. "Then make haste off; I have only half an hour to stay, and, as you have to go round to the Temple before going to Gordon Square, you'd better start; the walk will do you more good than the drive with me later on. I shall see you there presently."

"You have quite decided that I am not to go down to Kingswood with you to-night, sir?"

Never anywhere but in the office did Kenneth use this title of respect in addressing his father, but there it came so naturally that he was himself hardly conscious that he used it.

"Quite decided. You were only asked to attend the funeral, while I——Reynolds, I rang because, if you have anything you want to ask me about to-morrow, you must ask me now. Don't wait, Kenneth. You are going to take Doris to the Opera, I hear. Well, tell them I won't be late. What's that you say, Reynolds?"

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"A gentleman, sir. He gave us no name, but he particularly wishes to see you, and will not detain you many minutes, he says."

"I must see him, I suppose," grumbled Mr. Bradford, setting down his hat conspicuously, as if preparing a hint for his visitor.

"I will endeavour not to detain you two minutes," said the visitor, entering a few seconds afterwards, with a bow and a smile. "I can well imagine how valuable Mr. Bradford's time is; and, if he spares me only a fraction, I shall be grateful, and not encroach."

The lawyer bowed coldly. He had two strong English prejudices—he was slow to trust in either foreigners or flatterers; and that this man was both, he detected simultaneously by his eyes and ears.

"Allow me to hand you my card," the visitor said, without adding a word of explanation as to why he had refused to send it in.

Mr. Bradford raised it a little, and read the name without his glasses—"Monsieur Philippe Sourdet."

"If I can assist you, Monsieur Sourdet," he said, placing the card upon the table, "I am at your service for twenty minutes."

"I would by no means intrude so long," returned Monsieur Sourdét, drawing his gloves slowly between his fingers, and speaking with a smile ever coming and going, and an observant restlessness in his black eyes. "I introduce myself to you to-day, Mr. Bradford, as to the trusted solicitor of the late lamented Squire of Kingswood."

"As well as of the present Squire," added Mr. Bradford, quietly.

"Undoubtedly."

Monsieur Sourdét inclined his head slowly as he uttered the assent, and then his heavy lips closed for a moment.

"To-morrow the remains of the late lamented——"

"To-morrow—yes," put in the lawyer, in his companion's pause.

"Pompous obsequies, no doubt. It is not every day that such a house as Kingswood loses its head."

"Fortunately not," returned Mr. Bradford, curtly; and then he waited for his visitor to introduce the subject of his call.

"My first thought, when I heard of the sad event, was one of gratitude that he had left so few to regret his loss."

"The fact, as a matter of gratitude, never struck me," put in the lawyer, composedly.

"Did it not? As I say, it was one of my first thoughts. Your august and stately English funerals are lengthened miseries, I should say, to sorrowing survivors; and so I hope there will be very few witnesses of the gloomy pageant."

A pause ensued, which Mr. Bradford showed no anxiety to fill.

"Therefore I trust," continued Monsieur Sourdet, seeing that he must depend upon himself, and feeling that twenty minutes would not allow any waste, "that Mr. Monkton has left but few relatives to follow his remains."

"No relative at all will follow him," observed Mr. Bradford, fully and rather searchingly meeting his visitor's gaze, "save his own son; but I've known dead men—rich men—wept over by half a hundred relatives, whose sum of sorrow altogether would not make *his* sum."

"I can quite readily credit it," returned Philippe Sourdet, suavely; "but still one regrets he should be alone in his mourning. Surely" the Frenchman's eyebrows were slowly and sympathetically raised as he asked his

question—"Mr. Stanley Monkton will be present to-morrow, to pay his relative a last respect?"

"The last would be the first in that case," said Mr. Bradford, tersely. "Stanley Monkton has shown respect to no one all his life."

A quick nod of the Frenchman's head was the reception of this remark; but, vaguely and almost uncomfortably, Mr. Bradford felt that the gesture showed a sense of relief.

"Then, would not the opposite motive bring him, sir? One life less now stands between him and the fortune and the estate of the elder branch; and such a knowledge might well bring him over to have a look at the old place."

"Nevertheless, it does *not* bring him," observed Mr. Bradford, gravely. "He is not to be at Kingswood to-morrow."

"Indeed!"

The curt remark was essentially English, yet from none but a Frenchman could have proceeded the slight, expressive gesture which accompanied it, and of which Mr. Bradford took keen note, while he was, at the same time, fully aware that underlying the sham astonishment was a sensation of relief.

"I fear," he said, pointedly, "I am detaining you with idle conversation. May I ask you how you need my advice?"

"Not advice, exactly," replied Monsieur Sourdets, drawing his fingers still slowly over his gloves, in a way which sorely worried the lawyer; "I wish to beg permission to follow to-morrow in the procession which thus would show its respect to the departed, and—of course, a natural sequence—its good-will to the survivor."

Mr. Bradford rose from his seat.

"If that is all," he said, partly relieved to feel the interview need not be lengthened, and partly resenting the unnecessary loss of his time, "you need not have troubled yourself to come to me. Anyone who wishes to show the respect you speak of will be at liberty to make one at the mournful ceremony."

Monsieur Sourdets, taking the lawyer's hint, rose slowly to his feet; but the fingers of his right hand still fondly stroked his glove, and his hat remained upon the table.

"As Mr. Monkton's legal adviser," he said, presently, his heavy lips a little dry and hard,

"you will, of course, sir, be the one to read the late Squire's will?"

Mr. Bradford bowed his head. This stranger's impertinence called for no further reply.

"But," resumed Monsieur Sourdets, with a sudden air of candid humility, "I fear I could not plead for the privilege of hearing that."

"I think, sir," returned Mr. Bradford, chillingly, "if you were more conversant with our English customs, you would scarcely have broached the request."

"Thank you—thank you for exonerating me," said Philippe Sourdets, still with the novel appearance of humility. "I am, of course, ignorant of the way you English observe these funeral celebrations; but I fancied that perhaps, as a relative of the wife of the late Squire—ah, for a moment I overlooked the melancholy death of last Saturday—of the late Mr. Scot Monkton——"

"Scot Monkton!" interrupted the lawyer, reflectively. "He was Robert's elder brother, and he married—let me see—why, bless my soul, he married the only daughter of the Earl of Edent! Are you a relative of *his*?"

"It would be a liberty in me to exhaust your

valuable time over my uninteresting pedigree," returned the Frenchman, smoothly. "Am I still exiled from the little legal ceremony which will wind up to-morrow's programme?"

"It is easy at any time," observed Mr. Bradford, still puzzling over the possibility of this man's belonging, even remotely, to the British Peerage, "to see a will at Doctors' Commons. I will initiate you afterwards into that English ceremony, if you like. Dear me! Are you really a relative of Lady Emily Stuart's?"

"Her early death, and that of her young husband, were sad——"

"But," interposed the man of law, coolly objecting to have his question parried, "did I understand aright?"

"I have the honour, Mr. Bradford, of being connected *very directly* with the family of Scot Monkton's wife. Am I," with a smile of bland insinuation, "still to be kept without the pale to-morrow?"

"I will, if you wish it, speak to Mr. Monkton."

"Thanks." The Frenchman's gloves were still at last, and he took up his hat. "I hoped you would have offered to take me in

with you ; I should have felt the obligation, and returned it, perchance, at some future time. But you intend me to understand your last suggestion as nothing more or less than a polite negative. Well," with a parting smile, and the gracious offer of his broad hand, " I am content to be treated as a stranger instead of a relative. We must all suffer at times the 'slings and arrows,' *et cetera*; and indeed, with regard to the will, no one could be in any doubt as to its purport. When an only son is left, one can pretty safely venture to guess the destination of the property to be willed—eh, Mr. Bradford?"

"One can always venture to guess, Monsieur," assented the lawyer; "no power, even of the law, can stop a man's guessing."

"I thought," he added to himself, after the door had closed upon his visitor, "if he knew how to take a hint at all, he would take that. What can induce the fellow to want to hear the Squire's will? If he expects that any such name as *his* is mentioned there, his absence will, at any rate, save him a mortification. Sourdét—the name is as strange to me as the look of the man himself! Sourdét! And related, he said—not connected only, but really related—to

the Stuarts! Stay! I'll just look it over."

Taking down a heavily-bound book from one of the shelves, Mr. Bradford turned to a certain page, and studied that intently for a few minutes.

"The man's assertion was a lie!" he muttered, closing the book with a bang expressive of the contempt he felt. "I thought so. But how"—a grim smile stole over his lips as he replaced the book—"can a man be prepared for wholesale falsehoods, even from a chance visitor? His motive! Well, that will keep. I can think it over in the train, I shall have more leisure then. The moment he came into the room I distrusted him; and I rarely distrust without some cause. Polite enough he was, and well dressed, but there was more of the adventurer than the aristocrat about *him*. I must think it over presently. Poor little Lady Emily!"

On his way to the door, the lawyer stopped a moment at his son's table.

"Kenneth seems to have put up his papers to-day, for a wonder," he thought; "but I must give Reynolds that form for the Assignor *re* Harrison, and the notes for filling in. I hope Ken didn't forget them. It was the last thing

he did, so would lie at the top here. This is it, I suppose."

Kenneth's business hand was clear and good, but his father would as soon have thought of studying a law paper without his glasses as of walking down Chancery Lane without his hat. So, with his glasses on, he stood and read the paper he had taken first from Kenneth's drawer.

"Notes for the filling in of form for Assignor *re* Harrison. First—

'The seventh is young Lord Adelbert,
The victor over all ;
Slowly he leaves his wounded steed
And treads the kingly hall.
The rose-wreath and the golden ring
He takes—the conqueror's prize—
Kisses the maiden's pallid cheek,
And breathes her name, and dies.'

Well, that's a novel way of filling in a form. The practical filling in of a certificate of lunacy, I call that! What a fool Ken is!"

Yet, for all his muttered anger, the old lawyer laid the paper almost gently back in the drawer.

"He—the lad might at any rate have chosen a more lively subject," he mused, pettishly. "What connection can such a fable have with a man's business life? Folly!"

"Reynolds," he said, aloud, as he passed through the outer office, where the clerks bent silently over their work, "see to those forms, will you? Mr. Kenneth had a—a German matter to decipher, so he may not have had time to complete what I said this morning you might leave to him. Good day to you all."

The clerks, one and all of whom had made their own discoveries as to what lay behind the calm concentrated front of this old man of the law, looked up to answer his parting nod with a brisk "good evening, sir," and then Mr. Bradford passed down the squares and through the archway into Holborn, where, without fixing his eyes upon any particular object, he raised his umbrella as a dragoon would draw his sword, and stood a moment in placid expectation. And when two hansoms drove up, with a brisk idea of contesting the prize, he ran his eye calmly over the points of both the horses, before he selected one to take him to Gordon Square.

CHAPTER VII.

GORDON SQUARE is not by any means one of the most cheerful spots in London ; but—as Miss Joan Bradford sometimes said to herself, when she turned into it on her way home —“each of the houses contains its own little world, and, in spite of the depressing want of individuality without, strange and wonderful life-histories are being worked out within.”

Miss Bradford's was one of the porticoed houses on the north side of the square ; but, though to all outward seeming a twin companion to its next-door neighbour, it is doubtful whether the whole square contained another house which, like its mistress, was so softly and richly clothed, so pleasantly impregnated by soothing tints, and bright ideas, and flower-

scents, and had altogether such a warm, sweet air of home about it.

Miss Joan felt this more pleasantly than usual that evening, as she sat in her easy-chair near the window, the long full skirt of her satin dress falling over her crossed feet; and the lace shawl on her shoulders—as well as the lace turned back upon her sleeves, and lying on her neat grey hair—as white as falling snow. There are some people who, when they sit alone, give a room gigantic proportions, and themselves sink into a mournful, solitary insignificance; but, though Miss Joan's drawing-rooms were large and lofty, and she was alone in this one, there was a something—an indefinable fitness in everything—which made a perfect picture, without dearth or deficiency.

This was what Doris Egerton thought when she opened the door; and her step, which had been so light and swift upon the stairs, slackened a little as she advanced to Miss Bradford's chair.

“Auntie, I'm here.”

Miss Bradford raised her head, dropped her knitting into her lap, and brought her spectacles to bear upon the young figure opposite her—such a pretty, bright young figure, with eyes

full of fun, and lips running over with laughter, yet so shy and pure and sweet.

"Will it do, Aunt Joan?"

Miss Joan suddenly gathered a grave and doubtful expression into her eyes, totally obliterating the one of pride and pleasure which the girl's sudden presence had evoked.

"What do you mean by 'it,' my dear?"—and her spectacles went upwards, from the white dress to the dainty little bunch of ferns and lilies which fastened it at the throat, and from the piquant face to the wreath of fair bright hair.

"I think I meant myself altogether, auntie," explained Doris, with a laugh and a blush. "You see, I'm grown up now, and I'm going to the Opera for the first time as a grown-up person; and—will Kenneth be impressed, do you think?"

"With your great age, you mean?"

"Now, auntie!" And, forgetful of the new dress, down went Doris upon her knees beside Miss Joan and kissed her; after which Miss Joan, softly inhaling the lily fragrance, and letting her cheek rest beside her darling's for a few moments—as if her warm heart clung to something sweeter still—inquired, with an air

of indifference, why she did not wear a brooch, or a bow, instead of those flowers, which were sure to droop before the night was over.

"I would rather have the flowers," said Doris, softly touching them.

"And so would Kenneth, eh?" retorted the elder lady, with a great pleasure in her eyes, as she felt how these two favourites of hers had both the tastes she loved. "Well, if you don't object to be the cause of early death to anything so pretty, I don't. Now, cannot you read me something till they come? I don't expect either of them in proper time for dinner—I never do. Kenneth has too many chimeras, and his father too many clients. Bring one of the magazines."

The old lady's eyes followed the girl as she crossed the room. Was it really little Doris—the child whose holiday visits to this house had been its rarest sunshine, yet who had always caused a certain trouble and restlessness there, by reason of her high spirits and the very varied pursuits in which she delighted? Little Doris! She was such a child always in her loving, wayward moods that her flashes of romance and earnestness had been something only to laugh at; such a child that the brightness and

softness and grace had seemed too natural to call for either wonder or admiration. Little Doris! Had she then grown out of her childhood suddenly in one afternoon, or had Aunt Joan been sleeping for a year, while her little girl drifted softly round that corner where the brook and river meet?

"What is it, child?"—her thoughts escaped in words at last, as Doris came back to the window, with a book in her hand. "When did you grow up?"

"To-day, auntie," said the girl, answering her aunt's real thought, while she laughed happily; "the moment I put on this very long dress, and twisted my hair up. You had the dress made beautifully for me; I never saw anything so pretty, auntie, did you?"

"Lots of things," returned Miss Joan, curtly; "and as for the dress, my dear, any girl's dress is always sure to look well if she acts upon what George Herbert tells her: 'Say not that this with that lace will look well, but this with my discretion will be brave.' Yes, I see you understand—don't look so grave about it. Now begin to read. What was the part in last month?"

Miss Joan Bradford had a memory which was excessively unstable in the retention of fiction, and, though she took in almost every magazine which was issued, and always conscientiously regarded the serial stories as their prominent features, before beginning each month's instalment—generally read aloud to her by Doris—a certain and unvarying programme had to be gone through. With a somewhat puzzled expression behind her glasses, she would put it thus—

“Doris, my dear, I'm ready to hear the next chapter, but first tell me where we left off.”

“Just where the hero and heroine are going to run away,” Doris would say, perhaps, as to-day. “Don't you remember, auntie?”

“Remember! Of course I do! But—let me see, who are the hero and heroine, and where are they going to run?”

Upon which Doris, with a sparkle of laughter all over her face, would turn the magazine down upon its face in her lap, and, in a style peculiarly her own—compounded of great awe for the pathetic passages, an intense enjoyment of the happy parts, and an irrepressible excitement over the sensational incidents—would tell

the tale from the beginning. At the conclusion of which feat, Miss Joan would nod her head, and tranquilly observe, "Yes, *now* I remember." And, after that encouragement, Doris would be allowed to begin the current number.

The year being young on this day, what Doris had to relate was only equal to one volume; so she had completed it, and Miss Joan, after listening attentively, had placidly assured her she "remembered," when Mr. Bradford came in, followed by Kenneth, whose face bore a very emphatic answer to Doris's previous doubts as to whether he would be impressed by her appearance.

"Doris," he said, with a flash of real pleasure on his narrow, sallow face, "how lovely you are to-night! You are like—a lily in the moonlight, I think, with the one spot of green at its heart."

"Opera—eh, Doris?" observed Mr. Bradford, dryly, as he watched her pleasant, unconfused reception of his son's admiration. "And you think you are going to enjoy *that*? Pooh, pooh;—it's only the dress you are going to enjoy, and it's only *you* Kenneth will enjoy. Don't I

remember being a fool myself once, and taking Ken's mother to the Opera ? I was a younger fellow than he is, for it was the year the Reform Bill was passed ; and when we got home, we didn't know what opera we'd heard, either of us. Dear me, I little thought then that I should ever have a son of my own, and an arch fiend gnawing at my ankles !”

“Is the gout bad to-day ?” asked Miss Joan, keeping back the laughter from her face. “How sorry I am !”

“Don't tell falsehoods, Joan ; nobody who hasn't had it can be sympathetic over the gout. It's as utter an impossibility as that a bachelor should love his wife and children. There's Kenneth—he's a good deal more sorry for lunatics who die to muffled music on the stage. Bless you, you can't help it, lad ; poets are all insane, more or less—generally more. Well, there's one comfort for us ; the race will be extinct some day, like the white elephants.”

“I will tell you what you ought to say, Mr. Bradford,” said Doris, with a quiet touch upon Kenneth's arm, the meaning of which he understood full well—

“ ‘ Oh, if billows and pillows, and hours and flowers,
And all the brave rhymes of an elder day,
Could be furled together this genial weather,
And carted or carried on wafts away,
And never again trotted out—ah me,
How much fewer volumes of verse there'd be ! ”

“ *You* quoting ! ” ejaculated the lawyer, starting back. “ To what is the world coming ? A child like you should not know what rhyme means. Now it is my turn to quote against you—

‘ Man for the head, and woman for the heart,
Man to command, and woman to obey—
All else confusion ! ’

Woman has need only of a heart, you see, and to obey.”

“ I see, Mr. Bradford—when she has all the heart, and the man has all the head. I think it is far better to say, both for the head and both for the heart.”

“ Most uncomfortable state of affairs ; only fit for the stage—that is, for Kenneth. He reverses the general idea ; the world is not a stage to him, but the stage is his world. A narrow idea, lad, and your mental muscles will soon be as contracted as those of the old farmer whose daily prayer was, ‘ Bless me and my

wife, my son John and his wife—we four, and no more. Amen.’”

“Mustn’t the poet’s world be a very wide, instead of narrow, one, Mr. Bradford?” said Doris, gently. “He has a world within, as well as the one without, you know.”

“All rubbish, my dear! Why, I knew an artist once, who had a picture hung in the Academy, and he spent every day of the whole three months before it. No visitors, of their own accord, were inclined to notice it, but he drew their attention to the painting eagerly, as if he were a spectator himself, and had been wonderfully struck by it, pointing out its beauties, and going into raptures over them. Could anything be more contemptible than this solitary fellow, always—with idle hands and hungry vanity—hovering over this one work of his, in the wild delusion that people believed him a connoisseur, struck by real merit in the painting? Certainly he never uttered a word in dispraise of the works of his successful brother-artists, but he scarcely glanced at them, simply because his mind was too narrow to hold them.”

"Poor fellow!" said Kenneth. "Did he do any great work afterwards?"

"Before another exhibition opened," was the reply, as Mr. Bradford offered his arm to Miss Joan, on the summons to dinner, "he was dead."

It was not until the meal was over, and they all had returned to the drawing-room together—for Miss Joan chose to sip her wine as long as her guests might care to stay,—that Mr. Bradford mentioned his approaching journey to Kingswood, and gave his son a few last instructions for following him on the morrow.

"How does Mr. Monkton seem to have borne this awful shock?" asked Miss Joan, as she quietly motioned Doris to the tea-table. "You've seen him, I suppose?"

"Yes, I saw him. He—I cannot tell you how he's borne it."

"Doctor Boyd says," put in Kenneth, "that he has been most manly in his grief."

"He comes into a large fortune," interposed the lawyer; but Doris fancied that there was more meaning in the sudden softening of his features than in the brusque words. "He'll

find it easy to bear the affliction of being master of Kingswood."

"His grief is like your gout, cousin," said Miss Joan, smiling; "we cannot feel it—yet."

"Whatever he had to bear, I think," observed Kenneth, "he would *bear* really, not bending under it."

"Holding himself upright, eh?" questioned the lawyer, hitting a great truth unconsciously.

"A large fortune will subdue all hearts to him, just as did that of Timon of Athens."

"Timon of Athens!" repeated the lawyer, in muttered contempt. "Always some fictitious fellow dragged in. Ken, for pity's sake, keep aloof from any man (or maid) of Athens."

Miss Joan laughed merrily. "It's of no use, cousin," she said, glancing up into his face, and reading all its kindliness behind its present freezing rigidity; "the disease has gone too far into Kenneth's constitution. You must give up your original methods."

"I must give *him* up," retorted the old man, turning away to take his tea. "I see how it will end. On the office door will soon be the placard, *Gone to the devil*. Shocked, eh,

Doris? Why, my dear, when the lawyers at the Temple used to dine at the 'Devil and St. Dunstan's,' they always informed their clients of the fact in those curt terms."

"How quiet you are, Doris!" whispered Kenneth, drawing his chair beside hers at the little tea-table.

"Silence is a girl's only charm," observed Mr. Bradford. But he came up to her side just then for a lump of sugar, and for a moment he let his hand softly stroke the hair upon her temples.

"A quarter to eight!" he exclaimed presently, as he put down his cup. "I must be off. Kenneth, you were in Grosvenor Place to-day, did you look at Mr. Monkton's house?"

"Yes. It was closed, and the hatchment up."

"All right. Now good-bye."

* * * * *

"Do you remember, Ken," asked Doris, as they drove through the quiet squares, "the first time you showed me Mr. Monkton's house in Grosvenor Place? There was a line of carriages before the door, and there were footmen in crimson on the steps. You said

they were having a party after the levee. I remember it so well! And to think of the house to-day!"

"The sad scenes follow so closely on the bright ones always," said Kenneth, gently, "that it is providential we do not see or feel them coming."

"But then," rejoined Doris, her own natural brightness coming to the rescue now, "you must remember, too, Ken, that the bright ones follow the sad ones just as closely. Now what have you to tell me? I never intended to be so dismal and stupid. I—I don't know why that sorrow at Kingswood should have such an effect upon me, when you're giving me so great a pleasure. Now tell me how the new poem goes on. Has Penelope finished that scornful speech to her lovers?"

They were driving through Drury Lane; and—though the noise was great, and the scene so blurred and scarred by squalor and intemperance, that Doris, contrasting this with the quiet squares which they had left only a few minutes ago, doubly felt how true it was that the dark scenes lay sleeping ever close behind the fairer ones—Kenneth, leaning forward in the

carriage, his face losing its quiet dreamy look, and every feature working with excitement, told Doris of the feelings which were to sway the wife of Ulysses through his new poem; of her truth and fidelity to her absent husband, and her scorn for her wooers, yet of the fatal timidity which led her to flatter and jest with, while she scorned them, and to make daily with her lips the promise which her heart could never keep.

"Like all other poets, Ken," said Doris, smiling, when he had finished, "you will make her a woman to be pitied as well as admired; but just think how easy it must be to keep true to one you love. Would it not be harder to write of a woman who kept true *without* the love to help her—the love which must make it all so very easy?"

"It would be a sadder poem," answered the young man, simply.

"Here we stop, do we? Oh, Ken, I'm so happy to be here!"

And the fact was evident, not only to her companion, but to many a spectator besides, who liked to see the pretty face brighten with pleasure or sadden with sympathy. At first, when the curtain fell, she would turn to her

companion and speak of the music and the scenes, her eyes brilliant with enjoyment; but gradually she grew very silent; and when all was over she seemed to wake from a dream, to give that slow anxious look into Kenneth's face.

"Did you feel strange, Kenneth—just as if you were a part of it all; as if the sorrow on the stage belonged to you and me, and we could not separate ourselves from it? I—I hope I shall never feel so again."

"My dear," said Kenneth, tenderly, as he folded her cloak about her, "even though I know *Lucia* so well now, I can never help being moved—as you are on this first night—by the graceful beauty of its music, and the solemnity of that closing scene. Still remember that Edgar and Lucia are now——"

"Never mind," she interrupted, with a laugh; "do not bring in the reality, just to cheer me; it is so unlike you, Ken, and—I'm all right now. Yes, I'm ready."

He hardly spoke to her through the drive home; but then they were so accustomed to be silent together when they would, that it never surprised either; and she, seeing only the old rapt look in his dark face, could not guess that

he had been made really anxious by that glimpse which she had shown of a new and uncharacteristic timidity.

When Miss Joan received her young cousins at home, she gave Doris an extra kiss.

"Send away your cab, Kenneth," she said. "You ought both to be able to enjoy a little supper now ; and I have something to tell you. Ken, we shall both have to lose our little Doris for six months. I have heard to-night from your father, love"—with a look, which was intended to be quite calm, into the girl's questioning face—"He will be here within a week ; but then he intends to take you abroad until September or October, and, as of course I cannot go, though he asks me, we shall lose you for the whole Summer. This being so, dear, I think you and I will go to Kingswood to-morrow and see the Dower House ; you wished it, and I know Kenneth will like to have us. Ah, I see how glad you both are ! Well, that is settled, then ; so send off your cab, Ken."

CHAPTER VIII.

IN the long and lofty dining-room at Kingswood, Miss Windish sat at the head of the laden table, presiding over "the funeral baked meats;" while her occasional glances into the immovable face of the lawyer at the opposite end of the long table always momentarily incapacitated her for her task. Several times had the housekeeper—her broad, comely presence soothing, in spite of its heavy black, and her face kindly, in spite of its genuine sorrow—tried to persuade Miss Michal that it would be no dereliction of her duty if she let the Rector's wife take her place, or one of those second cousins of the master's, or even if she let Sutton have the coffee served at a side-table. But no; Miss Windish thought it her duty, and would "go through it." So she did, looking very

colourless in her heavy crape, with every vestige of both shape and tint washed away from her swollen eyes; as great a contrast as could well be imagined to the broad, dark-haired housekeeper, who presided at a still more lengthy table in the hall, where the late Squire's tenants fortified the inner man against the ravages of an appropriate grief.

Once, at the beginning of the meal, Miss Windish had looked up, to meet, in great astonishment, the face of the Frenchman, who—by what she had chosen to call “an unfortunate chance”—had first visited Kingswood on the day of her return there. He had been standing just within the dining-room door, looking round into the faces of the guests; and for a few moments she watched him unobserved. Then her attention was claimed, and when she looked again he was gone.

The sigh to which Miss Michal gave vent on this discovery, was lugubrious enough, but still it was an unconscious expression of relief; and the feeling grew upon her as the meal passed on, and still she did not see at the long table that swarthy, smiling face.

Of course those old frescoed deities on the

library ceiling had seen many and many a varied shade in the faces below them, during the hundred years they had inhabited this room ; but it is doubtful whether they had ever looked down upon a sadder yet a braver face than they looked down upon in the late afternoon of that day, when Scot Monkton, leaning back in his lounging-chair, glanced up among them, wearily rather, yet with a subtle, restless longing.

The glance dropped slowly, lingering upon every object in the beautiful, familiar room ; and it had just gone wandering through one of the open windows, when the door was opened, and a man entered the room, with a curious motion, as if he were trying to walk on tip-toe across the thick, soft carpet, which would have muffled the sound of any tread.

In his inherent courtesy, Scot rose, a puzzled expression on his face, as he tried to recall where and when he had seen this man before. It was not long ago, he knew ; yet how could he grasp it, when, for mind and memory, the past week had dragged itself into a lifetime ? But he was not left to wonder long.

" Pardon my intrusion," the visitor said, in a tone lowered apparently to suit this house of

mourning, though it by no means suited the one thing by which it was accompanied—the keen, inquisitive glance round the splendid room—“and allow me, Mr. Monkton, to plead particularly for your servant—a fellow-countryman of my own, I see—who would not have admitted me thus unceremoniously. But I had a few words to say to you very particularly, and so I took the liberty upon myself. May I have the pleasure of hearing you say you overlook his leniency to me?”

“Artaud acted rightly,” said Scot. What more could he say, while the Frenchman stood waiting for that unnecessary answer, with the bland, beseeching smile upon his face?

It was all clear to him now, both where and when he had seen the man before; and with a feeling as much of weariness as of contempt, he pointed to a chair, and retook his own; leaning forward in it, with one arm upon his knees and his eyes upon the ground.

“You have something particular to say to me?” he questioned. “I will hear it, Monsieur Sourdet, if I can in any way serve you.”

A smile, both sinister and suspicious, played round the Frenchman's lips; but it did not delay

his answer, and Scot Monkton saw nothing of it.

"Perhaps the service done will be reciprocal, Mr. Monkton; let us hope so, in any event. I quite as anxiously consulted *your* interest as I did my own before I determined on this step."

"Interest!" repeated Scot, looking up at his companion. "No step of yours can affect *my* interest; but, if you think it can, and wish to speak of it, let me refer you to Mr. Bradford of Gray's Inn. He is now in the house, and will probably give you an interview."

"I wish for no solicitor's intervention myself," returned Sourdét, speaking still in a lowered tone, while his glance took in and valued every article the room contained; "and even if you insist upon it now, there will come a time, I fancy, when you will wish you had taken my advice, and had allowed the matter to be arranged solely between our two selves."

"I do not think so."

Scot gave this answer very quietly, as his eyes went straying through the room with that strange look which told of something stronger even than his love for it.

"I have in my possession now," resumed Monsieur Sourdét, seeming to sit more and

more upright in his chair the more Scot, in an irresistible dejection, stooped forward in his ;
“an important family secret.”

“Probably, monsieur ; many men have.”

But the young man's handsome face had suddenly grown stiff and haggard, when he answered in those cool, slow words.

“A family secret, which is of the utmost value.”

“Impossible,” put in Scot, with quick contempt ; “no secret is ever of value. Will you be kind enough to spare me yours—especially to-day?”

“I do not call it mine,” the Frenchman placidly answered, pleased to see that he had stirred his listener at last ; “the secret equally—indeed, I may say far more nearly—affects yourself. It is one of which you would not like to feel that anyone else was cognisant.”

“Then spare me the consciousness that you know it !”

“It relates especially,” was the Frenchman's answer to this glimpse of Scot's old haughty coolness, “to your uncle, the late Squire of Kingswood.”

“The late Squire of Kingswood,” said Scot,

more sadly than angrily, "was my father."

"Yes—certainly, yes," rejoined Monsieur Sourdét, with a gesture of deprecation, which sat awkwardly upon him; "but I referred to the late Scot Monkton."

"What would you say of him, Monsieur Sourdét?"

The words were uttered more tranquilly than the others had been, yet even Philippe Sourdét's unpractised ear caught the change of tone.

"What I have to say of him," he replied, softly drawing the palm of one hand over the back of the other, "I can only say after you have agreed to my conditions, Mr. Monkton."

"What are they?"

"They are simply—nothing can be more simple to you—a question of *livres*, or, as you English would say, sir, a mere question of pounds, and shillings, and pence."

"You mean your terms, then, not conditions; you are desirous of *selling* your secret."

The concentrated contempt of the young Squire's voice affected the Frenchman's breath for a few moments. He indulged in an abrupt laugh as he regained it.

"I chance just now," he said, trying to regain

his ease, "to see how I can be benefited by the use of ten thousand pounds; and for that ten thousand pounds, Mr. Monkton, I will—as you so proudly put it—sell the secret; or, as you may wisely prefer, keep it myself untold. What say you, Mr. Monkton? Ten thousand pounds is but a trifle to you."

"If you have any communication to make which is worth that sum," replied Scot, rising wearily, "pray make it to Mr. Bradford, and he will pay you whatever it is worth. If you prefer telling it to me, tell it at once, and I will be just in my payment too."

"You wilfully (or very innocently) misunderstand me," said Sourdét, his affected patronage failing to hide the new tone of malignity. "I will have no dealings with your legal adviser; I will leave that to you. He is not a man with whom I should care to be mixed in business. But, independently of that, it is for your interest to decide this matter yourself. You could never miss the sum I ask."

As he said this, his eyes, valuing everything they fell upon, swept the wide expanse of park beyond the open windows; and, almost unconsciously, Scot's followed them.

What a beautiful home this was, and how dearly he loved it !

"If I had ten thousand pounds," he said then, quietly, "I would perhaps ask you to tell me what you know of my uncle's life—as for buying your *silence*, I would not do it if I had ten thousand times ten thousand pounds—but, as I have not, you must do as you will with your secret."

"When you have had time to think the matter quietly over, Mr. Monkton," returned the Frenchman, with an attempt at airy certainty, "you will, I think, entirely change your mind. As for your not *having* ten thousand pounds, you must, if you please, tell that to the marines, as I've heard you English say. And you will not, I'm sure, voluntarily step into an open chasm when a mere signature of yours will ensure you such a splendid——"

"We have said quite enough on this subject," put in Scot, in a tone of unmistakable pride and displeasure. "I hope I have made my meaning as clear to you as yours is to me. Your secrecy nothing should tempt me to buy. If you can give me any information respecting my uncle's life abroad, I will willingly pay you what it is worth—after I know it. As for

paying you 'in the dark' for intelligence of my own family, I have not the slightest intention of doing anything so absurd, either now, or at any future time."

"You are out of sorts, sir," said Philippe Sourdets, with the very evident intention of giving a genial turn to the conversation, that this interview might not summarily close the intercourse which had been so far, to all appearance, unsuccessful; "you look ill and tired; and I am to blame for this intrusion. I will wish you good afternoon now, Mr. Monkton, if you will allow me. I feel it a privilege to have been permitted to follow your honoured and lamented father——"

The plausible speech was never completed, for something in the young Englishman's face slew the false words before they fell; and Monsieur Philippe Sourdets, his step not quite innocent of a desire to sneak, and his heavy form not more guiltless of an inclination to cringe, walked through the groups in the great hall, and drew a few breaths of air outside the silent house, before he ventured on the pleasant desultory chat which he wished to enjoy with one or two whom he had, during

the day, set apart in his mind as worthy of the honour.

* * * * *

From a deep reverie, Scot Monkton rose as the library began to fill. Every phase of the long, sad ceremony was over now, and those who could pay no further respect to one of whom they had all such pleasant memories had come to bid farewell to "the Squire."

"*Le roi est mort—vive le roi!*" The words forced themselves on Scot's memory with bitterness just then. Perhaps through all his life—through the years that were past, and the years that were to come—never once again did such a tide of bitterness rush in and deluge his thoughts. He understood it all himself, and those who could not have understood it did not know of its existence; and so it swiftly passed, and Scot's own rare, trustful bravery swept back every trace of its acrid course.

"They have not even yet recovered from their surprise," observed Mr. Bradford, as the other guests left the room, and he waited with Scot, looking anxiously into the face of the rich young Squire, whom he knew to be far more envied than pitied to-day.

"They were all established in their own idea that your father must have made a will. Many a fabric, built on an expected legacy, has tottered to the ground this afternoon. I must confess that, though of course I knew I had made no will, I fancied one would turn up somehow. The Squire was such a kind-hearted, generous fellow that—though of course, in any case, his property would have gone to you, as it goes now (no one, knowing his love for you, could ever doubt *that*)—I should have fancied he would have bequeathed a hundred little legacies. Well, he knew best. I never *did* meet with such a head—out of my own profession; nor a kinder heart. And we must remember how suddenly his summons came, and what trust he had in the one who—as he knew—would inherit in any case. His confidence in you has never (he once told me this himself) been shaken for one hour, and so I don't wonder—there being no needy members of your family, and scarcely any relatives at all—that he didn't burden his mind with legacies."

"Mr. Bradford," said Scot, turning from the window, and pausing a few moments before the lawyer's chair, "my father left one legacy

—only one. I asked you to stay behind with me, because I wish to speak to you about it, if you please, now—you and I alone.”

CHAPTER IX.

DORIS EGERTON stood on the threshold of her future home, and wondered many things. There were no men at work to-day, and the reason of this Doris understood full well, as the slow, clear note of the funeral bell reached her from that slender spire which looked so white against the woods beyond the park. A beautiful view stretched before her, but over it all the funeral bell swept like a coming sorrow.

Miss Joan, entering the garden, stood a moment to watch the girl, vexed to see this look of sorrow on her face. The red japonica, hanging about the pillar against which she leaned, framed her like a picture—a pretty picture, Miss Joan thought, in spite of the black dress which Doris, like herself, had chosen to wear this day, but too grave, considering that the

Kingswood Dower House had charmed her so greatly on her first view of it.

Miss Joan hastened her steps, and touched Doris on the arm.

"Come, my dear, you have stood here long enough ; let us unpack our bag, and lunch, and then we can have a walk before Kenneth comes."

"Will he be long, auntie?" asked Doris, absently. "Will the funeral take a long, long time?"

"People don't generally hurry over those performances, my dear ; and I'm sure we don't want Kenneth back yet."

So Doris, with a smile upon her lips now—the smile was ever so ready to chase the short-lived gravity—turned with her aunt, and, walking through the empty house, they picked their way among bricks and mortar, and passed out into the garden behind, in which they had, on their first examination, discovered a pretty arbour.

There, quite cheerfully and hungrily, they ate the sandwiches, and drank the wine which they had brought ; and then, leaving the bag in a corner of the seat, with a comfortable assur-

ance that it was safe, they strolled together down the long garden, and unchained, and chained behind them, an iron gate which led them into a small shrubbery, the path in which was scarcely wide enough to allow them to walk together. But Doris only clung the more closely to her aunt, smiling as she compared this walk with one through the London streets.

At the end of the shrubbery, another iron gate separated it from a wide meadow, along the edge of which ran a straight bridle-road, bordered on one side by tall old larch trees.

"This avenue, you see, runs straight down to the river," said Miss Joan.

When they had walked about half a mile, they reached an old stone bridge, which led almost directly to a curious old farm-house. If three or four architects, of different modes of thinking, had all been allowed to try experiments in this spot, and then the results had been huddled together and formed into a dwelling-house, such an effect would have been but natural.

Behind it, the woods stretched to the crown of the hills above Kingswood; but in the valley

between the house and the river, and along its banks, lay the cultivated land of a farm.

Miss Bradford and Doris were crossing the bridge as they made these observations, and, before they had paused and considered where they were, they had opened the garden gate, and were sauntering up towards the house.

"Seeing that it is closed and unoccupied," Miss Joan said, "I think we may as well have a look round, my dear. I remember this old farm well; it is called the Black Birches."

"I remember too."

"You remember! Why, you have never even heard of it before!"

"Yes, I have, auntie." But Doris did not tell that she only remembered what Mr. Monkton had told her on the previous Saturday at Richmond, about this old farm of his.

"Those are the birches that name it," said Miss Joan, pointing to three trees on a slope beyond the house. "Your brother used to say they were as old as Burnham Beeches."

"How low the house lies!" remarked Doris, drawing a long breath. "I should not like to live here."

"The sight of the Dower House has spoiled

you for this," said Miss Joan, "quite naturally, I will own; still we have had a pretty walk, and I intend to rest here for a few minutes."

The seat which she had chosen was a broken bench from which most of the paint had been either washed by rain or peeled by the sun, and from above them a shower of thorn blossoms fell slowly to the ground like snow, while one true-hearted thrush sang of the young world which the Spring was bringing. Even Miss Joan could not guess how long the garden had been neglected, for the bordering tracery was lost, and the daisies and thrift which had been used to form it, straggled over each other, and were in some places eaten away, and in others trampled into the earth. Still the hyacinths proudly showed their beauty yet, and had not died for want of care; and, though the bindweed, with its spotless wreaths and bells, had taken a hold on every bar of one unopened gate, a little crowd of tulips burned yet in richest colours against a dark old yew beside the house. The bark of the young apple-trees was nibbled away by wandering sheep, but the pear-tree against the timbered wall was cut and nailed with care.

"What is it that makes it seem so melancholy, auntie?"

"The neglect," returned Miss Bradford, promptly, "and the ugliness of the place."

"Still the valley is very pretty, and I like the sound of the river," said Doris, her eyes following it in its course.

"You wouldn't like it always so near; it is dreary. Is that a man coming round the house?"

"Yes, auntie."

The man came slowly past them as they sat there—a small elderly man, but hale and strong and active—bearing on his shoulder a basket filled with knots of withered grass. When he had opened the gate, he held it for them.

"Thank you," said Miss Joan; "it would have been awkward if we had got ourselves locked in. Why, surely I remember your face!"

"Liath, miss."

And when he had said this, and touched his hat, he locked the gate, and stood, as if to give the ladies time to walk on without him.

There had probably been a time when his name was known as Goliath, his baptismal appellation having been given him in affectionate

remembrance of the giant of Gath ; but the wish alone must have been father to the thought, for a smaller labouring man than Liath it would certainly be difficult to find. There is a probability that he had had parents once, and a surname, but the memory of both was lost in the mist of ages, and, as he had never married or died, there had been no necessity yet to try to pierce this mist.

“Yes, I remember the name,” said Miss Joan, stopping for the old man. “Can you tell us, Liath, if there is any other way back to the Dower House?”

There was only this way by the grey bridge and the Larch Walk, Liath told them, unless they crossed the foot-bridge at the Green Pits up the river, or followed the river for about a mile, and walked across the iron bridge in the park ; but it was twice as far, at least, as going by the Larch Walk.

“Was that the Larch Walk along which we came ?” asked Doris.

“Yes, that wur the Larch Walk—that straight walk from the Dower ’ouse to the bridge.”

“How near together the two houses seem,

auntie!" said Doris. "And this is vacant?"

"Yes, miss," replied the man, fancying himself addressed. "I dunna quite know whether the master means to let it; it's old and gloamy, and the furncher inside's wored too."

Then, as if he had said his say, he put his fingers to his hat, and turned aside across the fields.

When they returned to the garden of the Dower House, Miss Joan formed a sudden and unexpected resolution—she would walk over to Comely Place and see Miss Chamberlain.

"You will come, Doris?" she added, a little doubt creeping into her tone.

"Indeed I will not," said Doris, hotly. "I will never go to see Miss Chamberlain."

"A silly prejudice, child; but, if you keep to it, I must go alone."

"It is no prejudice; it is an honest feeling," said Doris, "and I am not at all ashamed of it, auntie."

"All the worse. Try to dismiss such petty feelings while you are here alone, love."

But Doris would not let her aunt walk by herself; she accompanied her until they came within sight of two red gables beyond a thick

and heavy shrubbery, and then she turned and retraced her steps. She entered the Dower House through the garden at the back, and then passed on into the pillared porch. She would stand there again, and look across the wide and beautiful park, to that great house lying—with closed eyes to-day—upon the slope; and to that tall spire which rose so purely white above the trees.

Doris, standing back within the shade of the portico, was presently aware that some one was waiting near her, just without, by the straggling blossoms of the japonica. She went forward, and saw a cottage woman, who stood looking across the park, eagerly and intently. She was poorly, though neatly, dressed, and her face was so sad, and her attitude so full of shrinking timidity, that Doris involuntarily stepped forward and spoke to her.

“Look,” the woman said, softly, only having moved her eyes for a moment, to glance at Doris’s face, and then turned them back to their former gaze. “They are leaving the house now. What a mournful sight, miss, isn’t it?”

It may have been that Doris’s eyes were not

so accustomed to long distances, or the unfamiliarity of the scene may have prevented her, but she could not detect what the woman saw—the long procession moving slowly among the trees.

“Can you see them now, miss?” asked Anna Wakeley, presently; her voice low and subdued, but more by nature than by the subject she discussed.

Yes, Doris could see the procession now, though she shrank back to her old place, and looked out as if unwillingly, with a wistful sadness in her eyes. First came the four black horses drawing the hearse, then the line of mourning coaches, all so sombre, though weighed down by no pomp of feathers and velvet; then a long line of private carriages following slowly; and, after these, men's figures riding and walking in a confused, indistinct mass.

Anna Wakeley, turning when the procession had passed, saw that Doris had been standing with her face covered, and she went up to her in shy anxiety.

“It is a sad sight, miss; it is far better to turn one's eyes away—only I couldn't help

looking. I fancied I might have recognised the figures."

"You know many of them, I daresay?" Doris said, in her pretty, friendly way, though she hardly knew how to receive this strange glimpse of confidence. "I am a stranger here now, but I am coming to live here soon, at this very house."

The woman's eyes went slowly from the gentle young face to the empty house behind.

"That will be well," she said, almost absently; "the young Squire will not be so lonely."

"Will you tell me where you live?" asked Doris, her eyes clear and kind.

Just as Anna stood pointing where the row of poplars behind her cottage were visible to very strong eyes (or imagination), a man lounged up to the gate of the Dower House, and, seeing her, opened it, and advanced across the lawn to her side, only by a rude stare acknowledging the presence of Doris.

"Why ain't you at 'ome?" he asked his wife.

"Why didn't you follow the Squire, Oliver?" she inquired, in return, her low voice contrasting oddly with his rough tones.

He threw back his head with a hard, unsteady laugh.

"Follow! I'd like to see myself at it! Go 'ome now, and get the room ready for the furriner; he's comin' to stay to-night. And mind you have some supper for'm. Be off!"

"Why—why is he coming?" asked Anna.

But it was only half the horror of the tone which fell so sharply on Doris's ears.

"He's stayin' cos he's business to-morra with young Monkton—though you'd no cause to ask, nor to be told. Are ye goin'?"

"Where are *you* going, Oliver?"

"What's it matter to you? If I choose to walk to the 'ouse, and see if there's beer about, I s'pose it ain't no business o' yourn. Now be off!" And, without waiting to see his order obeyed, he slouched back again into the park.

Seeing the woman's bitter shame and misery, and guessing at a little of the truth, Doris came from the porch, and gently laid a hand upon her shoulder.

But what could she say? Could she mention the drunken husband, or this nameless foreigner, the very mention of whom had brought such

real pain into the woman's face? Doris—though, in the kindness of her heart, she longed to say something—was too innately delicate to touch on either subject, so she only said just the words which came to her lips of their own accord.

“It is very lonely here.”

Anna turned and looked questioningly into the girl's face—the pretty, sunny face which had struck her so strangely in its brightness, there and upon that day. Yes, the words had been felt at heart. In all the glare and brilliance of the Summer afternoon, some chill of loneliness had fallen upon it.

“May I come back?” she asked, with a sudden purport, drawing her shawl around her, as if preparing to leave hurriedly. “I will not be long, Miss; shall you be here?”

“I shall be here,” said Doris, gently; “thank you, I shall be glad for you to come.”

Perhaps Anna guessed that the gladness would have two motives, for she smiled a grateful smile which seldom visited her lips.

How Doris would have wondered if she had been told beforehand that she would regretfully

watch this woman leave her, and be childishly seized by this inexplicable sudden loneliness !

She turned into the house, and wandered once more through the echoing, empty rooms, trying to engross herself in their distribution. This would be her father's library ; this her father's smoking-room ;—Ah, what pretty rooms they would all be, when her father's choice had furnished them, and he was here himself to give them their real look of home ! What a pretty home to spend a long, long life in !

Across the picture darted a thought which, clear and vivid as it flashed, vanished before its light had blended in among these scenes. It was a vision of the home of which Kenneth so often spoke, the home of which she was to be the light and soul and beauty ; where Kenneth and she were to work out life's grandest problems together ; he a famous poet, and she the one thing dearest to him in the world. So often this life had been pictured to her that it was strange how fleetly the vision faded from her grasp when, as now, it had risen upon the picture in her mind—most strange, though Doris never felt it so.

“ Poor Ken, how true he is ! ” she said, with a

soft little sigh : and then she went back to her planning, and saw her father's figure in the brightest and pleasantest spot of every room.

Doris never thought how long she had been dreaming in those upper chambers, until, when she returned to the hall, a rather startling sound greeted her—the crackling of burning wood. For one moment she stood appalled, and then through one of the open doors she caught a vision which brought a smile to her lips.

Within the empty dining-room, Anna Wakeley was unpacking a basket, and spreading tea-cups on the temporary table supplied by the absent paper-hangers ; and, kneeling on the hearth, the labourer whom Doris had seen at the Black Birches was feeding with splints and shavings the fire which crackled under a kettle already singing cheerfully.

Years afterwards Doris used to tell—and sometimes with odd and unaccountable tears in her eyes—of the real joy which this discovery gave her, though the full reason for this joy was never quite defined even to herself. She told of how kindly and quietly the woman waited on her, and how sweet the bread-and-butter tasted, and how refreshing the tea ; and how Liath

blew with his mouth until the wide flame leapt and scattered all the solitude. Then of how they stood and told her—not of the grand old house, but of the cottages about her home ; while she sat there, a little queen, waited on with as much gentleness by the hard hands of the man as by the soft seamstress fingers of the pretty cottage woman. But it was only Liath who ever mentioned afterwards the pleasure any other but Doris had had in that afternoon which brought them together for the first time. For to whom—apart from these two—could Anna ever tell of feelings which were fanciful and womanly and pure ?

So, after all, it was little wonder that, when Miss Joan arrived, a hearty laugh, as well as hearty thanks, followed her first astonished gaze and exclamation ; and even as little wonder that the sight which met him chased from Kenneth Bradford's face the sober reflection of this day.

“I thought all the Kingswood men were at the funeral.” This he said, addressing Liath, as he pleasantly and courteously received a cup of tea from Anna's hand.

“All but meself, sir,” the old man answered,

quietly, but with a certain brisk cheerfulness which belonged to him, and did not leave him even on such a day as this. "I didna care for to go, sir. I—I didna care to see the young master's face. I passed the church jest at the time, but didna wait. It wur crammed, I see'd—crammed, with 'undreds as were shut outside—so they wouldna miss one. And th' old master wouldna have minded, cos I was ne'er a disobedient servant all his lifetime. He'd sooner I'd be a honest and trusty servant to's son, than have walked in that long posession—in another man's clothes."

Kenneth smiled, and the smile grew when he noticed Doris's earnest and prompt assent to this, and the curious intentness with which she studied the old man's hard face.

"He is true, Ken," she said, afterwards, when Liath had left the room; "I can see it."

"I dare say, dear. Now, Aunt Joan, you must say when you are ready. There is no fly to be had to-day, so we must walk to the station; and my father is going to stay at Kingswood all night, so we will start when you choose. We have half an hour before the next train leaves. Shall we go along the turnpike—

road, or through the park, past the house?"

"Not past the house, please."

It was Doris who answered ; but, though Miss Joan would have preferred the park, she nodded assent, and they set out along the highway.

"It has been a beautiful day ; have you at all enjoyed it, Doris ?" Kenneth asked.

"No—I think not. Please don't ask me why. It was all sadder than I—expected. But thank you for bringing me, Ken. I know it is my own fault that it was sad."

"A funeral," interposed Miss Joan, "is not generally considered a very cheery event."

CHAPTER X.

“**A**ND you object to my seeing the paper myself?”

Mr. Bradford had asked that question before, and so, in spite of its repetition, he was quite prepared for Scot Monkton’s affirmative ; while the motive, which had faintly dawned upon him from the first, grew stronger and clearer with this second refusal.

“But if its substance is to be made public, and it necessarily must if you decide to act upon it, as you propose——”

“I not only propose, but am fully determined to act upon it, and at once.”

The lawyer took up his wine-glass, which for half an hour had remained untouched, and sipped its contents like a true connoisseur. Go where he would, he never tasted such port as the Kingswood port—in defiance of the warn-

ing twinges, Mr. Bradford was faithful to his favourite vintage—and as for the dry golden sherry; and then that Burgundy, which went so freely round this morning, and every drop of which was worth a lawyer's letter—what a pity it all was!

But whether his pity was for the value of the wines, or something which was recalled to him by the flavour, Mr. Bradford did not state in his thoughts.

“And those are all the particulars in this paper, Mr. Monkton?”

“Shall I repeat them?” asked Scot; and the lawyer was keen enough to see that he avoided a direct answer.

“On the very journey which—on that last journey my father took—he met a young man who bore such a striking resemblance, in voice as well as face and figure, to his brother Scot, that the likeness haunted him, and—inexplicably, as you say it seems to you, but none the less firmly—fixed upon his mind a conviction that during those two years my uncle spent abroad, and—and privately married, he left a son, who is—naturally, as you will say—in poverty.”

“Was the likeness so remarkable that your father felt sure this must be a Monkton, or did it merely serve to fire this train of thought?”

The lawyer asked these questions in his usual business tone of meditative shrewdness, and his eyes were upon the fire—the two gentlemen had just dined together, and the servants had rightly guessed that a fire would remove a little of the gloom of the house to them—but he was still keenly aware of the fact that Scot was carefully keeping something from him; and, knowing so well the honourable, fearless nature of the young man, it was easy for him to resolve that the something kept back related to the late Squire's part in the transaction. That he had, in that dying moment, made a fuller confession to his son, Mr. Bradford had no doubt at all now; but that young Monkton would ever be tempted to entrust this confession fully to his legal adviser, whatever confidence he might be supposed to place in this legal adviser, and however great a relief it would be to him to place the secret in other and more experienced hands, he had a very strong and impregnable doubt indeed. Easy and pleasant as the young Squire had always been, and always must be, Mr.

Bradford understood well the mainspring of his character, and knew that, though he might use every argument his experience could suggest, Scot Monkton, who so plainly saw the right, would pursue it to the end.

"There are but two ways for a man to tread," he had said, quietly, after first broaching this subject to Mr. Bradford, "and I see no by-paths from either. Right and wrong are far enough apart, and the boundary between is clear; so why should a man hesitate? He must tread one way. There is no straight and honourable path between."

These words the lawyer recalled as he asked his last question, feeling that the son's quiet ignoring of his father's wrong was but a proof that he himself was not to be turned from his own simple, brave decision.

"I cannot answer that question with any certainty," he said; "I wish I could. I can only tell you the facts. My father's first request to me as he lay dying—indeed, his only request—was that I should search among the dead for a young man whom he described to me—chiefly by his dress, and the peculiarity of his wearing an overcoat and

comforter. I believe—I believe that, if I had brought him word that the man lay dead, this paper would have been burnt by my father's own hand ; and therefore——”

“Decidedly,” put in the lawyer, with quick comprehension. “He felt that if Scot Monkton had left a son at all, that was the man, and that, if that man were dead, you need not be troubled.”

“Even if dead, he might have a son,” said Scot, calmly ; “he must be older than myself.”

“Tut, tut !” muttered the lawyer, feeling a ridiculous stoppage in his throat. “*He* have a son to lay claim to Kingswood—the idea is preposterous !”

“But the man was *not* among the dead,” said Scot, to whom evidently the other idea was preposterous. “The man is living, and, as I need not remind you, Kingswood is his—or at any rate is the property of Sir Monkton's son.”

“It's all rubbish—all utter folly !” decided Mr. Bradford, filling his wine-glass hurriedly. “But of course, as you are set upon diving to the bottom of this matter, we will institute inquiries at once. I will send out to-morrow, if you like, to—where was it ?”

"San Remo, on the French side of the Alps."

"Such a place to choose!"

"The girl he married was a villager's daughter—I believe."

"I'll swear it was no marriage at all!" put in Mr. Bradford, angrily. "And you will give up Kingswood for the sake of some low-born French scamp, who will come forward and claim the old name, just to drag it through the mire? Think well, Mr. Monkton, before you decide upon this rash step."

"I have thought. There was no *need* of thought, but it is here constantly," said Scot, dropping for an instant his worn, brave face, and letting it rest upon his hand. "No thought could change that one decision, Mr. Bradford. I shall give up Kingswood to its owner."

"If I saw that paper, perhaps a little light might be thrown upon the subject for me," began the lawyer, looking away from his companion's face, and uttering the words as if they contained quite a new and natural idea, which had never been propounded and refused before.

"I have told you its purport; please let that suffice, because I feel that my father wrote the words for my eyes alone. Indeed,"

Scot added, closing his fingers nervously upon the arm of his chair, "I doubt if you could decipher a word. Remember in what agony he wrote it. Now will you please go over the facts?"

But, in the few moments' pause before he did so, the astute old man of the law came swiftly and steadily to one conclusion, and anchored firmly there. Robert Monkton had, years ago, known not only of his brother's marriage in France, but also of his having left an heir. It was only the shock of death which had wrung the confession from him; and Scot, knowing this, would keep that fact a secret—though nothing else.

"And he's right enough too," mused the old man; "for his father's honour is more sacred to him even than his own. I can see how the late Squire was tempted. If he had made public his brother's confession, he would have brought disgrace upon two high families, as Scot Monkton had married Lady Emily Stuart then. And, as years went on, was it natural for Robert Monkton to prefer the claim of a child of some low-born Frenchwoman before that of his own son—an honourable English gentleman? No,

no; it was little wonder that the Squire acted as he did, when the power was left so entirely to himself. And now must a vagabond, half-French son of the Monkton who had always been selfish and dissipated, come to turn out the very Monkton who would keep up all the love and dignity of the old name? Well, perhaps a wise and skilful Providence—always supported by a wise and skilful solicitor—might ordain it otherwise; and in the meantime no one should know of this possible local earthquake.”

“Go over the facts,” repeated Mr. Bradford, after very few moments’ silence had sufficed to fix the position on his mind. “There are no facts to go over, Mr. Monkton. You say your uncle married in San Remo; I say he didn’t; and we both agree that the fact shall be decided by the journey of a suitable ambassador. I will do as you wish, and send at once, and I will in person bring you the answer. Possibly I may go over to France myself. It is a question of vital importance, I see, in your mind, and the sooner it is settled the better; so I shall hope to be down here in a fortnight, with decisive and pleasant tidings, and,” with an effort at easy indifference, as he turned slowly to fill his glass,

"I hope, after that, we shall never have to discuss the subject again, even over such wine as this. Come, Mr. Monkton, you have not emptied your glass once; keep me in countenance, or I shall never have courage to attack this solace on my return."

"I hope you will attack it many times here," said Scot, raising his glass mechanically to his lips; "but it cannot, of course, be with me, Mr. Bradford. I shall leave Kingswood at once."

Down to the floor fell the lawyer's chair, as hastily and angrily he rose and strode up to the fire.

"This is rank insanity!" he exclaimed, seizing the poker as if to poke away a little superfluous wrath, but dropping it with a remembrance that he was not in his own office. "Why, Mr. Monkton, are you aware that if your uncle had left a dozen heirs, this estate is yours by right of law; the highest right in this country or any other, sir—provided always the country is civilised enough to appreciate the blessings of law? Are you aware that you have a firm holding title, and cannot be ejected for anyone? Twenty years' undisputed possession has given you a good title

at law and in equity ; and this property has been yours, undisputed, for nearly ten years longer."

"It is not a question of law," said Scot, simply, but the lawyer fancied that the words were even more decided than before, if that could be ; "it is a question of conscience with me."

"But I say that, in any case, Kingswood is yours. The property has been undisputed for——"

"Who," asked Scot, "could dispute a property while he was kept in ignorance of his own name and right? Don't argue it any more, Mr. Bradford; my mind has been made up from the first, and I have decided what to do."

"You go abroad, then?"

"Abroad! What money have I to take me abroad? No; I have but one possession of my own, all else belongs to the owner of Kingswood. I am going to earn my own living on my own land. You know the old farm that Harris left me? He gave it to me because he felt it ought to be part of the Kingswood estate—so it can eventually—but he made no mention in his will of its being so, and, instead of leaving it to my father, he left it especially to me as a lad.

How little"—with a short, swift laugh—"he thought it would so soon be my only estate and home!"

"Great heavens! You don't mean to go and vegetate at the Black Birches?"

"No, not to vegetate, if I can help it," said Scot, the old spirit in his voice showing that no subject save that one which touched his father's honour, and a wrong done by one of his name, could weigh him down in his manly strength and courage; "if I did, I should soon bring it to nothing, for the farm is not the richest one, I know. Never mind that: it is my own, and it is ready for me—even furnished. I intend to go to-morrow, for I have defrauded another man long enough. But there is one thing more I wish to tell you, if you have patience to hear. You saw perhaps among the people here to-day, a stranger, a Frenchman really, though he has as much English about him as French. He has been to me this afternoon to say he is possessed of a family secret of ours, which he wants me to buy from him. He would have had the transaction confined to himself and me, but, as the plea was put forth professedly for my sake, you may guess what weight that proposal had. If he

knows anything of those two years of my uncle's life, the information may be of value to us, and you, I know, will be generous to him—either on my behalf, or on behalf of the real owner of Kingswood.”

“Of what nature does he pretend the secret to be?”

The lawyer was standing before the fire, facing Scot, and, though his head was bent, his eyes shone clearly from beneath their bushy brows.

“I almost forget whether he described its nature at all,” the young man answered, looking up in wonder as the lawyer's change of tone betrayed an eager interest in this intelligence; “only I know he represented how prudent it would be for me to keep the matter in my own hands, and not consult——”

“T. & C. Bradford, eh?” put in the lawyer, with one of his rare, grim smiles. “A prudent fellow, too, on that point, is Monsieur Philippe Sourdet.”

“You know him! Why, Bradford, you know everybody!”

“Everybody. Tell me again what threats or promises were held out to the Squire of

Kingswood by Monsieur Philippe Sourdét."

"You utter his name almost as if you relished it," smiled Scot. "I conceived an unutterable repugnance to the man."

"Did you? How curious! I enjoyed him. I like fresh studies—no matter whether among men or reptiles."

"When he told me I had better buy the secret to keep *as* a secret, I had no further word to say. I want no secret to keep. If he can help us in our search, for Heaven's sake let him do it, and hasten the right we want to do. If not, of what use is it to know his unavailing secret?"

"Of what use indeed?" muttered Mr. Bradford, reflectively. "Did he accept your decision as decisive?"

"No, he returns here to-morrow—I think he said so as he left me."

"Good; and he possesses information which you will not buy?"

"Which I have no money to buy," put in Scot.

"I suppose I may buy it for you, on condition that I give it up to your *protégé*, the new heir, if valuable to him—eh, Mr. Monkton?"

"But you cannot know until you have bought it on his terms; and I should fancy that, like myself, you will refuse to move in the dark."

"What! He must receive the money first?"

Scot looked up, once more surprised at the tone of keen, amused intelligence.

"Yes, those are his conditions; and he asks ten thousand pounds—quite a trifle to ask from a penniless man."

"A mere trifle, indeed—a mere trifle—a mere trifle," repeated the lawyer, deep in thought; "but a man who insists upon payment before delivery of his goods has seldom any goods worth delivery. That's my experience. Now, Mr. Monkton, I'll say good night; I have a few things to think over in my own room. Leave me to see Monsieur Sourdets to-morrow."

"Thank you," was the reply; "I dare say I shall have left here before he comes. No, I am not going to bed yet. My time is so short in the old home now that I cannot waste any of it; and sleep has been an utter stranger to me lately. Presently she will be an old friend again; for don't they say the sleep of the labourer is sweet? Don't look compassionate, Bradford; my hands are strong enough; I

was the Oxford stroke, you know; and, as for muscle, why, 'the muscles of his brawny arms are strong as iron bands.'"

"A poor mask!" muttered the lawyer to himself, as he went moodily to his own chamber. "I don't like that flash of indifference and that ridiculous reference to the blacksmith, while the young fellow's heart is bleeding. And little wonder! To lose his father—a father whom he loved so well; and his family honour—always so dear to him; and his property and home—a home I believe it wrings his heart to leave; to lose all at one blow! It's enough to shake the strongest principle, and make the bravest and noblest fellow stagger. Still, how firm he is in his decision! Kingswood will be shut up"—the lawyer had paused at a window on the staircase, and was looking out, as if he could have seen the wide and rich estate—"and the young Squire will mould and crumble into a decayed gentleman and insolvent farmer, down in that damp, unhealthy hole by the river. Pish—not he! Before the year's out, we'll have him back at Kingswood, troubling his conscience no more about mythical heirs, but just taking the goods

the gods have always provided him, with his lips sealed for ever on the subject of that reprobate uncle of his. So the romance will end, as all romances end in this work-a-day world of ours."

* * * * *

"Scot!"

No answer. The young man was pacing the room slowly, just as he had paced it through the brief narrative he had been telling Miss Windish. He had not intended her to know of his projected departure from Kingswood until the next day; but, as she had come in to him then and questioned him, he had told her, dreading, more than he could say, the tears he knew would follow, and the dismal diving into his motives and intentions.

But that faint call of hers he did not even hear, as he walked slowly to and fro, like a prisoner who is tired of being motionless within his cell, and yet has little strength to walk.

"Scot!"

No answer still, and so she rose and met him, and stood before him with her eyes full of tears, as he had known they would be, and her voice querulous, as he had felt it must be.

"Going to live at the Black Birches, Scot? That wretched farm on the river, which old Harris left you only as a little adjunct to Kingswood? Going *there*, Scot—you?"

"I, Aunt Michal. Please put it as cheerfully as you can—in your thoughts of me, at any rate. In reality I shall not mind it at all."

"You," she repeated again, faintly, and gazing aghast up into the young man's face; "you, bred up in such refinement, and so fond of—of all that riches bring! *You*, a scholar and a gentleman!"

"I, Aunt Michal"—Scot's hands, kind and gentle, fell softly on Miss Michal's shoulders, and his bearded lips went warmly down upon her twitching mouth—"I can be a gentleman there as well as here. But, Aunt Michal, tell me one thing, honestly and candidly, as I have told you this. Have you quite enough to live comfortably and easily upon, away from Kingswood? Of course I would not have asked this question unnecessarily; but now I should like to feel sure."

"I've enough, Scot," answered Miss Windish, curtly, and without a suspicion of tears in her voice now. "I've truth, and honour, and affec-

tion to live upon; that's plenty, isn't it, for a solitary, unattractive woman like me? I've all these, Scot—at least, some one else has them for me—and I intend to live upon them—at the Black Birches."

CHAPTER XI.

MR. BERNARD LEVEY had not yet returned from Kingswood, where, in a Bond Street sable suit, he had officiated as one of Mr. Monkton's mourners, comfortably convinced that his new barouche—on which the armorial bearings were so large and radiant—was by far the most stylish equipage in the line, and certainly must have cost more than any other. What a contrast to that old rickety yellow coach of the Earl of Edent! Why, some of the bystanders had said that *that* had never been relined since—empty as now—it had been sent from Edent, thirty miles away, to follow the funerals of the Earl's daughter and her young husband within six months of each other. Bernard was still doing his best to bring himself and his black suit before the notice of Scot Monkton, and deliver his neatly prepared speech of condolence,

when his sisters, at home, suddenly awoke to the consciousness that they had been sitting opposite each other for an hour, in an uninterrupted reverie.

The morning-room at Osborne House—the room in which the sisters always sat when they were alone—was so vivid in its colouring, and so unshaded in its windows, that it could hardly be conducive to reverie; but still there was the fact—Rose and Violet had been musing for an hour, sitting opposite each other at the high bow-window, through which was to be seen a gorgeous diorama of flower-beds of every size and shape, laid out in that striking and original style in which nature is wooed and coaxed into an imitation of art, and the lavish beauty of Heaven's most wonderful gifts is cramped in its arrangement until it resembles, and is proudly named after, the produce of our ribbon-looms.

Gazing upon the scene, though without seeming to see it, the sisters had sat through this long silence, when, as if by some magnetic influence, their eyes met, and they each woke to the absurdity of having spent an hour so uncharacteristically—for their thoughts were not

apt to wander far beyond their own immediate acts and surroundings.

"I was very tired this afternoon; were you, Vi?"

So Miss Levey broke the spell of silence, smiling a little, and raising her hands languidly to fold them behind her head upon a braided cushion, which certainly could never have been manufactured with any intention of soothing the human cheek.

"Bernard is late," observed Violet, as she rose from her couch, and tossed back the long train of her dress with an action slightly suggestive of the stage. "I'm sick of this silence, Rose."

Very sick indeed she must have been, to care to break it with such a strain upon her own voice and her listener's ear, as followed her rapid touch upon the piano. Violet Levey was one of those singers who always seem to feel their way up to a note by the performance of a dumb scale. It may be the requisite inhalation of breath for the telling upper tone, but the effect is excruciatingly wheezy, and gives the listener a painful sensation, in no way akin to the pure delicious pleasure music *can* give.

But it was not because her sister's upper note had just pierced her ear that Rose Levey interrupted her.

"Vi," she said, as if in continuation of a previous conversation, "be sure you hint to Bernard that he should bring Mr. Monkton here often. Now that he has lost his father, he will be more ready to come ; but don't leave all this to me to say. Bernard is so suspicious."

"Of you more than of me?" inquired Violet, exhibiting for a moment her double row of white teeth, as she rose and settled herself more comfortably on the music-stool.

Rose had, in a high frame beside her, a gorgeous combination of dahlias in woolwork, and at this moment she drew it towards her, and bent all her energies to put in the needle at the right spot ; but Violet's narrow, wide-open eyes saw crimson in her sister's cheeks which was no reflection from the woollen dahlias, and she smiled again as she ran one large white hand softly and chromatically down the piano.

"Being shut out now for a time from all gaiety," continued Rose, bringing her needle back with a measured deliberation which argued but poorly for the conclusion of the great work

within an ordinary lifetime, " Mr. Monkton will be thrown, as it were, upon his neighbours. He will not go to London, of course, and he will have no visitors at Kingswood. During this time we can, if we manage cleverly, become very close friends. Don't you see this, Vi?"

"Of course I see," said Violet; "and of course I'll speak to Bernard when you do. But he needs no incentive to cultivate Scot Monkton. Why, he would spend a year in indefatigable cultivation if he could be sure that, at the end of the time, he and Mr. Monkton would be spoken of—here and in London—as chums. Didn't he unwittingly confess as much the other night? And as for the prospect of his marrying one of us, why, Bernard would literally dance for joy—dancing being his favourite occupation, I may as well use that figure of speech as any other. So don't worry, Rose; we're all agreed. Bernard will never think you mean it more than I do, or than he does."

"I don't see," said Rose, reflectively, patting with her forefinger the one stitch she had completed, "why he should not eventually choose one of us. We are friends and neighbours, and

he need not be ashamed of either of us as mistress of Kingswood."

"You put it with a modesty not too characteristic," interposed Violet, laughing. "Why don't you say what other people say—that we are the most stylish-looking girls in the county? Style is the only thing, after all, which would influence an aristocrat like Scot Monkton. I hope so at any rate, and I mean to try," she added, accompanying the last word with a clashing and not too melodious chord. "No offence, Rose, if I say I have a greater chance than you; because I sing, you see, and Mr. Monkton is so fond of music."

"He never asks you to sing," put in the elder sister, with a little excusable spite.

"Do you suppose, my dear, that you hear all that he says to me?" inquired Violet, starting now into the symphony of a high Italian *bravura*, in which her soul delighted. "Are there no moments in our existence in which he can make observations unheard by you?"

"He never cares to make them," rejoined Miss Levey, sturdily. "I should give up all idea of him, if I felt he did. I"—her cheeks colouring a little, and her breath quickening—"I

would not rival you in earnest, Vi; but now, while it's doubtful, and we've equal chances, it's all fair."

"All fair," rejoined Violet, with a nod, "and we shall manage it somehow, one of us. If it is I, you must hide your jealousy by some means, my dear, and congratulate me and him. If it is you, I will smother mine, and bring poor Captain Gresford up to a proposal. That's Bernard's step."

When Mr. Levey entered the room, he went up to the piano, to set his sister right in a trill of astonishing power. But there are some indignities against which human nature rises in prompt revolt, and prominent among these is the lecturing of a brother. Violet rose majestically from her seat, and beckoned to her sister.

"Come away, Rose; Bernard wants to practise his scales."

Young Levey laughed good-humouredly. Both he and Rose had learnt to receive quietly and indifferently the domineering of their younger sister, and, as their natures were but little less shallow and self-engrossed, this was neither difficult nor painful to them.

"What a stupid temper Bernard was in!"

said Violet. (This kind of remark is generally made by the one who has excited the temper). "I hope he will be pleasanter by dinner-time, because I want to hear about Kingswood."

The sisters had reached Violet's dressing-room, and she had brusquely spoken out in the hearing of her maid; but Rose passed on into her own room and shut the door. She felt too angry with her sister to linger with her, and, beyond that, her thoughts were busy and engrossed.

What plan they framed that evening, Violet, whose projects were so similar, could well conjecture; but what the maturing of those plans was to cost her, Violet could never guess.

"It would be different for Vi."—Rose, in her green silk dress, flounced to the waist behind, but tight enough in front to make a satisfactory balance of economy, was taking her last look in the glass, and, with one conclusive argument, bringing her thoughts back from an engrossing theme.—"She would be quite as content, after a time, to be the wife of that insipid Captain Gresford—more content perhaps, for she could dictate to him, and he would be submissive. Of course the idea of living at Kings-

wood, and being the great lady of the county, and—and Mr. Monkton's wife, is everything to her now; but the only meaning it has for her is a grand marriage, a splendid home, and the jealousy of other women. While I"—Rose's hand closed tightly as it lay upon the table, while she almost uttered these words aloud—"I love him. I used to feel only what Violet feels; but now my whole heart is set upon him."

CHAPTER XII.

THE effect upon Mr. Bradford of his interview with Philippe Sourdét, on the day succeeding Mr. Monkton's funeral, was but to confirm him in the opinion he had formed on first hearing of the Frenchman's proposal to Scot.

Monsieur Sourdét would only reveal the family secret he held, after he should have pocketed, safely and securely, the trifling sum of ten thousand pounds, which he had fixed upon as its equivalent. Monsieur Sourdét declined to relinquish his information on the chance of receiving only what the lawyer should consider it to be worth ; and Monsieur Sourdét smiled and gesticulated pleasantly at the notion of betraying such excessive mental juvenility.

"Plainly," argued Mr. Bradford to himself, studying the strongly-marked countenance opposite him, "the information held by Monsieur

Philippe Sourdét is of less value to us than ten thousand pounds, and, being so, is of less value than ten thousand pence."

"Plainly," he argued to Monsieur Philippe Sourdét, with an essentially English tranquillity, "we need waste no more time over this child's play."

Of this interview the English lawyer never thought it worth while to speak after he had dismissed it with a few words of hearty contempt; but the French adventurer mused over it a good deal before he woke to the conviction that with an Englishman threats are always far more efficacious than promises—had he not found it so in Australia, and was there any doubt that Englishmen *were* Englishmen all the world over?

So Philippe Sourdét walked slowly up to Wakeley's cottage on the slope, and thought it all over quietly there, his eyes half closed beneath the heavy arched brows, and his hand, hardened within the palm though sleek and smooth without, guiding itself unerringly, without the aid of vision, to and fro between his lips and the slowly-replenished glass upon the table.

The man did not bear the hopeless, unmistakable stamp of the confirmed drunkard, but that habits of intemperance were not unwelcome to him was a fact which, though he was conscious of it, and guarded scrupulously against its betrayal, must have been patent to the dullest comprehension.

Sourdet was alone in the cottage kitchen, and, before he moved, the Dutch clock, for the second time, struck the hour, with the usually lively effort of a Dutch clock to do its duty, ending with a brisk stroke which bore no evidence of being the last, and left the listener still in an expectant condition.

Monsieur Sourdet raised his eyes slowly during the operation, but that one long thought behind them was stationary still, and had no connection with the words which idly passed his lips as they broadened into their heavy smile.

"As a time-keeper, you are too fast, my friend—a little, just a little; but, as an article of *virtu*, you are irreproachable. Your preponderance of face is true artistic symmetry, and your lankiness—or I may even say stringiness—of form is an elegant conclusion. Good! Now,

if you told the truth, you would be perfect, but unfortunately your moral perceptions are slow ; and five minutes are of value to us poor mortal time-keepers, especially—on some occasions—such as—this.”

Speaking thus, half aloud to himself, the smile gradually leaving his swarthy face, and giving place to a look of concentrated calculation, he drew a pocket-book from his pocket, and wrote on one of the blank leaves. Then, cutting the leaf out with methodical precision, he laid it down upon the table with a half-sovereign upon it, and the tumbler over it as ballast.

“That will do. The note and the money will be observed by whichever enters first. If it is my devoted and sober friend himself, he will pocket the little coin with a smile upon his angelic countenance ; but, if it is his pretty wife, probably—sad fate—her tender heart will break with anguish. My absence will cloud her otherwise sunny sky, and bring her smooth brown locks in sorrow to the grave. Poor thing—poor thing ! She is not a bad specimen of a drunkard’s wife. For such a fate I could almost be a drunkard myself—almost—almost.

Now is that all until, after this little trip of mine, we meet again—we three dear friends?"

He stood for an instant looking round the cottage kitchen, and then took up his hat and put it on.

"I am glad to know his purpose, and I am glad to have had this opportunity of making my own plans in peace. The old man, clever as he thinks himself, will be but a stranger in San Remo."

And with these words he turned hastily to leave the cottage; but when he had passed the door he subsided into his usual heavy, dragging step, and, like a veritable idler, "whistled as he went."

It was not until he had taken his seat in the London train that he once more put a thought into words, and, with his hard and heavy smile, muttered—

"So far well; and, even if the whole journey is wasted, it is not very likely that the young Squire will hold out long. He does not know yet what it is to be poor, and his first lesson will be enough, I'll warrant. It isn't as if he simply gave up a big house for a little one. Why, I could not count, between here and

town, the things he would forfeit. There's his town house as well as this, and his trips abroad just where and when he chooses. There's his stud—by far the finest hunters in the county, they say, and he so devoted to sport; and there's his drag and team—haven't I noticed it conspicuous on every race-course for these two years I've been in England? There are all these pleasures for him to give up, not to speak of his clubs, his dinners, his dances, his drives, his rides"—more and more brisk grew Monsieur Sourdets tones as the enumeration continued—"his opera-boxes, his flirtations amongst the upper ten; all these, no less than the *luxe* and indolence of a rich young favourite. Bless you, no, he won't hold out for long!"

And, with this consolatory reflection, Monsieur Sourdets settled himself for a further mental calculation.

When Oliver Wakeley returned home that afternoon, he found his wife sitting in her favourite seat at the window, and on the table lay the memorandum, with the coin upon it.

"What's this?" he asked, taking up the paper

to answer himself, while Anna went quietly on with her work. "Oh, I see—the furriner's off for a bit, and this is his pay. Well, he might ha' paid wuss. You'll own that now, my girl, eh?" The little gold coin had evidently put Oliver into a good humour. "It'll save me bothering for work for a few days; but I wonder you hadn't pocketed it—ye're generally sharp enough after the tin. D'ye think it bad money, eh?"

"Yes," she said, dropping her hands for a moment as she looked out from the open window; "yes, I think it so—bad money, Oliver; and I would not touch it if I were dying of starvation."

CHAPTER XIII.

WHEN Mr. Bradford left Kingswood that morning, he had fully decided to go himself to San Remo, and he determined to spend only one day in London before starting.

An hour later than the usual hour for closing his office he held an interview there with a skilled detective of whose services he had often availed himself; and Kenneth was still at work, preparing notes for his father.

That night the detective left London for the little French town on the Italian frontier, and the next day Mr. Bradford took his ticket for Paris, and in an easy, leisurely manner travelled on to San Remo. And when, upon the stairs of the hotel, he met a quiet, gentlemanly-looking young fellow, who greeted him with a "*Bon jour, Monsieur,*" uttered in his throat as

only a Frenchman can utter it, he answered the salutation with an impatient English "Good morrow," and walked on, and inquired who was that jabbering young fellow who spoke before he was spoken to.

"The young Monsieur is an artist," the *garçon* answered, with a swift and characteristic motion of his fingers as if they held a pencil; "and he is in San Remo now for the purpose of sketching a few of the old houses. There are curious old houses in San Remo—but Monsieur will be going to see the town."

Monsieur thought he would. And when, in his saunter, he came across this young Frenchman, in a broad-brimmed white hat, sitting with his back to a cottage door, sketching an in-artistic building opposite, and listening the while to the merry *patois* of a young woman who sat on the doorstep near him, and looked on at his work with idle knitting-needles in her hand, the lawyer stood a moment to look too, and then passed on, impenetrable, to smoke a cigar in the narrow divan of Monsieur Alfred Leclos hard by.

Monsieur Louis Leclos, who, according to the English version of his sign—translated for the

benefit of stray English—employed his time in “watch reparations,” noticed that his brother stood at the door of his *boutique* with an intelligent Englishman, and that the Englishman could evidently appreciate a San Remo cigar. So—there being no important “reparation” in hand just then—Monsieur Louis, as a matter of conscience, crossed to assist them, equally to smoke and to gossip.

That evening the grey-haired English visitor, too tired with his sauntering about San Remo to care to read, and because it was now so many—ah, quite thirty—years since he was here before, invited the landlord of the hotel to share his Bordeaux, and to bewail with him the changes which these thirty years had witnessed.

And the young French artist dined abroad, at a little corner *restaurant*, near the scene which his half-finished sketch had probably endeared to him, and, after his solitary and cheerfully imbibed bottle of “Val de Penas,” strolled out beyond the boundaries of the town, until he reached a road-side cross, where he fell in naturally and pleasantly among a group of idlers, and where, though he attached himself gallantly to the cottage girl to whom he had

whispered so many soft speeches that day, he chatted with others too, until they all felt as if they had an old friend among them, and congratulated themselves on their discernment when he told them, regretfully, that he had been quite a boy when he last looked upon that cross.

Yes, he must have been away a long time ; they knew it by his accent. Monsieur l'Artiste must be very glad to see San Remo again.

Delighted ! Monsieur l'Artiste was delighted to see again this spot so beautiful. The only drop of bitterness in Monsieur l'Artiste's sparkling cup of joy was the absence of so many of the well-beloved of his youth.

“ Ah ! ”

The listeners, old and young, lifted either their hands, or brows, or shoulders, at this melancholy reflection, and briskly and cheerfully did their best to enlighten—and to mystify—Monsieur l'Artiste on the San Remo of his boyhood ; some guessing it at ten years ago, some at twenty, and some of the elder ones going comfortably back for thirty years.

Returning late to his hotel that night, and entering it in his smiling, desultory fashion, the

artist saw that his landlord and the English visitor were still sitting together in the otherwise deserted *café*. In his cheery, sociable way, he joined them at the small round table; and even when mine host had risen and retired, the two visitors sat and chatted still—but in rather a lower tone now, neither impeded nor hurried by a word of French.

Next morning, for the purpose, perhaps, of better digesting his unusual breakfast, Mr. Bradford walked out to a cottage which stood alone on the outskirts of the town. It chanced to be the cottage Monsieur l'Artiste had yesterday selected to paint; but the lawyer, wrapped in contemplation of the mountains, might easily have been unaware of the coincidence. He did not pause at the door the first time he passed it; his head was bent as if in thought, and his hand went involuntarily to the pocket where he carried his note-book; but slowly he drew away the hand, empty still. There was no need just now to refer to those notes.

“The substance of them I have by memory clearly enough—clearly enough, what there is, but too little at present. Let me see. Thirty-two years ago, a family of the name of Sourdét

neither a rebellious nor a chilly reception could have done.

"I was told," he said, quite at his ease again after the first few moments of surprise, "that you had various birds for sale, and, as I am anxious to meet with a real native of Dauphiny to be a memento of the pleasant tour I have made, I thought you might be able to oblige me."

So the old lawyer, quiet and far-seeing, began the interview, which he kept up for more than an hour, gliding from birds to trees and scenery, and then to the town itself, its houses and their inhabitants.

"I remember," he said, coolly and boldly striking the nail on its head, "when this old house was the home of a pious Curé, whose sermons—Sourdet, ah, his name struck me at that moment! You of course could not remember him?"

What Mr. Bradford had so skilfully avoided saying about the Curé's sermons never was inquired into. The woman who occupied Père Sourdet's house, evidently recollected Père Sourdet well, and was willing to retail all she

recollected. So Mr. Bradford, criticising the birds the while, as they chirped and pecked and hopped in their tiny cages, listened with quiet interest, and only put in his idle questions when the speaker made any decided pause. All that he had noted so carefully she either asserted or verified; and then she added items which the English lawyer—always suspicious in his shrewdness—sifted with intense care.

She had known Sophie Sourdets well; had been her comrade at school forty years ago. Sophie had been always a *belle*, but a vain and wilful one, deserving her hard fate.

No, she had never seen the gentleman who had carried away Sophie—she was in Vienna at that time; but she remembered Sophie's return with her baby boy, and how she was changed, and how swiftly, after that, other changes followed, and in a few years' time her uncle, if he had been living, would not have known her.

Dead? Yes, poor Père Sourdets had died suddenly—killed, some of the San Remo folk had said, by the last letter Sophie wrote him, just before she herself came creeping home, so

changed. Philippe Sourdets was living here, though, and she came—as was but natural—to her brother.

One day, soon after Sophie's return, she remembered an Englishwoman sitting with them, and telling them about a large house there was in London for babies who had no fathers—or as good as none—and she had noticed how eager Sophie was in listening, and what numbers of questions she asked.

After that, one day Sophie and her baby were missing, and, when Sophie came back to San Remo a month afterwards, she came without the boy. From that day she had never mentioned him, and had left off caring about herself, and so—as was but natural—had soon let carelessness finish the work that sorrow and mortification had begun.

Mr. Bradford, offering his forefinger for bait to a vicious little goldfinch, and looking with concern into his very uninteresting little round eyes, inquired if his companion could recollect what she had heard that house in London called. Such an excellent institution it must be, that he should like to hear more of it.

No; she had not the name in her memory,

though possibly she might recognise it if she heard it. It was *the*—something.

Mr. Bradford, screwing his lips into a whistle for the benefit of the goldfinch, thought over the subject for a few minutes, and then suggested the National Gallery.

No, no; certainly she should have remembered that without difficulty. It was a more English name.

“The Polytechnic?”

No. If it had been Polly anything, she should not have forgotten, because her own name was Polly.

“Then you are not French?”

No; she was by birth an Australian.

Mr. Bradford raised his head, to examine a puny canary which tried to assert itself above him, and then he turned to the woman with a new idea slowly dawning upon him.

“Do you think Sophie Sourdets took her child to a house called The Foundling?”

The hard face relaxed in prompt assent. Certainly that was it. The Foundling, of course! She wondered she had not recalled it without assistance.

“At that house,” Mr. Bradford said, smiling

at her pleasure, "they receive orphans and deserted children."

Yes—surely yes; and they had received Sophie Sourdets boy.

"But, generally"—the lawyer said this composedly, as if he would have liked, if possible, to set her mind utterly at rest, and was willing to spare a few moments for that generous purpose—"the authorities there, who so pitifully adopt the children, like to have some token with them, no matter how trifling, so that it may serve to identify the children afterwards. Does Madame know what little token Sophie Sourdets left with her baby?"

No; Sophie had not mentioned it.

"Probably not—most probably not," he assented, readily. "But were none of the little knickknacks the poor girl possessed, missing when she died?"

Another sudden light illumined the woman's face. She recollected one thing. Sophie had had a little book—a diary, it seemed—and some of the leaves had been torn out during the time Sophie had been in England; and on one, she remembered, had been fastened a little photograph of the baby's father.

Could it be that Sophie had left *these* with her baby?

"Hardly," said the lawyer. The intense indifference in his tone was noticeable, and his willing informant resented it a little. "Besides, would the baby's mother have left with him the only likeness she possessed of her lover?"

"No; Sophie had another, in a little locket which she wore all her life."

"And afterwards?"

"Afterwards," was the answer, "it lay here, with other possessions of Sophie's, until claimed by her brother, on his return from Australia two years ago."

"Her brother—the Monsieur Philippe Sourdet whom you have mentioned?"

"He had all the papers which Sophie left, and which he said were of immense value to the family of Sophie's husband."

A glance so shrewd and bright shot from under the lawyer's bushy brows, that it was well he had flashed it only upon the diminutive canary, who had not spirit enough to mistake it for a darting ray of sunlight, and so drew no one's attention to it.

"Monsieur Philippe Sourdet, you say, pos-

sesses papers of value, which were formerly his sister's?"

"Papers of immense value—yes."

"And Monsieur Sourdets is now in England?"

"Yes; and if the English gentleman wishes to see the papers, he should seek out Monsieur Philippe, and prevail upon him to give them up—always provided it was to benefit the family of Sophie's lover, whose name Philippe had probably by this time discovered, as when he left San Remo two years ago he had vowed to trace him by his photograph, being well aware he was one of the grandes of England."

"But why," asked the lawyer, fixing his keen eyes searchingly upon the woman's face, but speaking easily still, "should you imagine that I have any interest in this young man, whoever he may have been? And how, above all, can you suppose I should care for any papers held by the girl's brother? If he wishes to sell them, as probably he does, he will doubtless apply in the right quarter. I felt interested in the story—thoroughly so—and I am obliged to you for entertaining me. Now about the bird, if you please."

So had ended this interview, and Mr. Brad-

ford went thoughtfully back to his hotel, showing a marked falling off in his admiration of the quaint buildings, and very nearly forgetting to join Monsieur Alfred Leclos in his doorway; and keep up his reputation as a judge of a good cigar. Monsieur Louis was thoroughly devoted to a "reparation" just then, and so had strength of mind to deny himself the pleasure of girding his apron about his waist, and taking a brief smoke upon his brother's step.

Meanwhile the French artist had been as idle over his sketch as he had been indefatigable over his love-making, and before the sun shone from its meridian straight down upon the valley—as it had been for hours shining on the snow-capped peaks—the young Frenchwoman was leading him—tame and willing as the pet goat upon her other side—to and fro through old archways, and round and round old towers, and in and out of old chapels. And in one of these, in which they found that one Père Alphonse Sourdret had for forty years preached to the *auditoire*—Monsieur l'Artiste—who had such a ravishing way of saying charming things, and such a smile, and such boots!—could yet aggravate her by wasting the delicious time in

turning over mouldy papers—ugh!—and in talking to old men who hung about these places—old men, forsooth, when he might have been talking to a young girl!

“But, my cherished”—so Monsieur l’Artiste, with his ravishing smile, answered this pouting remark—“we are learning what formalities are necessary to make a man and a maiden into husband and wife—you comprehend?”

She comprehended, with cheeks of unmis-takable tint; and he, with half of his attention henceforth bestowed upon her, proceeded in his leisurely and mouldy search.

Early in the evening he returned alone to the hotel, and bowed with a pleasant smile to the elderly English gentleman, whom he passed as he walked to his own little table in the *café*. Presently he looked up from the paper he was reading, and addressed the lawyer.

“As an Englishman, sir—the only Englishman present, if I mistake not—you will be interested in this Parliamentary squabble. Stay,—I will bring you the paper.”

He had left the paper in Mr. Bradford’s hand, and was back in his seat before the other guests recognised who had been addressed; but with

the newspaper he had left a few words written on a card, and when Mr. Bradford held the sheet before him, and brought his glasses down the column scientifically, these were the only words he read :—

“I have proved the marriage, and have copies. Dates tally exactly with your information, and with the rumours here. I await your further instructions.”

Mr. Bradford's further instructions were just forming themselves in his head, when the woman from Sourdet's cottage—who had, according to promise, brought to the hotel the bird which he had purchased—asked if she might speak to him for a minute. The lawyer answered the request by joining her in the hall, and taking up his hat to show himself ready and willing to accompany her, but by no means willing to converse with her there.

“It is a pity to have come before you had heard what I had to tell, sir,” she said, in a stiff, measured tone, as if rehearsing words of the meaning of which she was a little uncertain. “You might not think it worth while to come then. But I wanted to tell you that after you had left me to-day I remembered a man—an

old man—here in San Remo, who knows a about the Sourdets family. If you are anxious to learn the rest of the story I told you, I will show you where he lives.”

Without any evidence of the satisfaction this idea gave him, and with still a counter-current of his innate suspicion, Mr. Bradford answered, coolly, that he might as well go and see the old man—if he lived near.

So near he lived that the woman paused even while he spoke, and, without a word, pointed to a house beside them, with a door high up in the outer wall, and reached by a flight of wooden steps.

“He lives there,” she said. “He is a Swiss, and very old. He lies in a half-darkened room; but you’ll see enough to talk. He is very infirm and decrepit, but his mind is strong enough, and his memory clear. Never mind waiting at the door for his answer; walk straight in.”

Mr. Bradford raised his hat courteously as the woman curtseyed, and then he mounted the steps, and knocked at the door to which he had been directed. Without waiting for an invitation, he opened it, and entered a room which, when he had closed the door behind him,

seemed all in darkness. But he had been prepared for this; so he stood for a few moments with his eyes closed, and then opened them and looked round upon his surroundings. It was a clean, barely-furnished room, lighted only by one high and closely-curtained window, and in one corner, on a low bed covered by a vivid patchwork quilt, was a man with long white hair, and a deathly face, more than half wrapped in bandages of two or three colours.

Succinctly, and without preamble, as if he had no wish to make this interview longer by one moment than it need be, Mr. Bradford told what the woman had said to him, and asked if it was true.

"If what's true?" the old man asked, his voice coming weak and muffled from the bed-clothes.

Again Mr. Bradford explained, briefly and distinctly; and then the old man rose a little in unwonted excitement, and his voice was less feeble and unintelligible.

"The Sourdets? I knew them all—uncle, nephew, and niece; niece's husband, and niece's son—I knew them all. I have papers which Sophie and her uncle left me, telling me never

to part with them blindly. *They* knew their value; they knew whose family they ought to go into, and they left them in trust with me."

"I will buy them from you."

The lawyer said this in his usual business tone, bending forward towards the bed as he sat beside it, and gazing—as he naturally would—into the face of his companion.

"You will buy them?" echoed the old man, falling back to his old position, and losing a little of his marked *patois*. "Very well; it signifies little to me. Are you of Monsieur Monkton's family?"

If the feeble old invalid had risen suddenly from the bed, a giant in size and strength, Mr. Bradford could not have been more thoroughly taken by surprise; yet so successfully had long years of experience schooled the English lawyer to hide all emotion that no one could have guessed how the mention of Mr. Monkton's name had struck him.

"Monkton!" he repeated, with an expression only of quiet thought upon his face. "We must be speaking of two different men. I had heard that you knew something of the young Englishman who left here with Mademoiselle

Sourdet, thirty-two years ago ; his name, as far as I have learned, was Scot—Robert Scot, I think they have told me.”

“Scot was his Christian name,” said the old man, meeting the lawyer’s steady gaze. “The name he hid from us here in San Remo was Monkton. There are hundreds of men you could blind with your cool practised manner, but not me. Could I have the documents in my keeping, and not know the real names of man and wife and son ? There’s another man who knows them too—a man in England”—a long fit of suppressed coughing interrupted the old man here, but Mr. Bradford was patient, and sat and waited for its cessation, when the bandages were pulled once more about the jaws and mouth, as if to keep every breath of air away ; “he is Sophie Sourdet’s brother, and he has the power to claim the papers from me when he will. He intends to hush it all up, if the Monktons will make it worth his while—at least, so he told me before he left.”

There was a pause here, as if the old man’s breath were failing him. Mr. Bradford, in his usual erect attitude, with one arm across the back of the chair, sat watching him. It may

have been that he feared the old man might sink before he had heard all he meant to hear, so closely now did his eyes hold him.

"He told you so before he left?"

"Yes, yes," was the faint, disjointed reply, "he told me so. For a certain sum, he said, he would give up the letters and certificates, everyone, that there might be a peaceable end to the matter. He doesn't want to make mischief in a rich family, he said, and Sophie's son had no claim upon him, so he'd put it out of his power to disturb the heir to a fine estate, if he could get some slight recompense for all this."

"Such as ten thousand pounds!"

"I don't think," mumbled the old man, with a renewed but slighter attack of coughing, "that he ever told me how much he should think it worth to the Monktons. That's not much. If he put it at that, you'd better close the bargain while you can—always supposing you belong to the family."

"And yourself?" inquired Mr. Bradford. "What power have you, if Philippe Sourdets can sell these documents?"

"He hasn't fetched them yet," chuckled the

old man, feebly. "They are only Philippe's when he claims them in person. I've no care that he should have them, if they would do more good in your hands. I should sell them to be used : *he'd* sell them to be destroyed."

"And you ask the same price that he asks?"

"I daren't take less, as he fixed it."

"Can I read them first?"

"Sealed, just as they are, they must be bought, or not at all." The cough became rather violent here, and Mr. Bradford turned away his eyes for a few moments, letting them roam leisurely over the room for the first time. "I won't have them unsealed until they go entirely out of my possession. Père Sourdét would have had it so; and they don't go out of my possession unless I have the money Philippe wants for them. They were left in trust with me, and I'll do my duty by the living and the dead. Try to decide quickly, sir. I'm too great an invalid to bear these interviews."

"I will decide at once," said the lawyer, rising, and looking calmly down upon the old man, who lay panting in the bed. "I do not belong to any family of the name of either Monkton or Scot, so you may judge how valueless

your papers would be to me. Sealed or unsealed, I know them to be equally worthless ; and, if I *do* chance to see Monsieur Philippe Sourdets in England, I will tell him—shall I tell you exactly what I will say to him ?”

The muffled answer from the bed was unintelligible ; but Mr. Bradford evidently took it for assent. He had pushed back his chair, and had paused beside the door to answer—

“I shall say, ‘Monsieur Sourdets, you and I settled this little matter once for all in San Remo, when I had the privilege of visiting you in your chamber. It was a poor chamber, sir ; though that is but natural, perhaps, for a gentleman who sets such trifling value on his effects.’ That is what I shall tell him then—as now, *Monsieur Sourdets*.”

In another minute Mr. Bradford was out upon the wooden steps, descending them coolly, without one glance of doubt or fear up to the door behind him.

“Putting myself in his place,” he mused, his stern features relaxing almost into a smile, “I should say the disguise was cleverly conceived, and carried out indifferently well ; and even his feminine confederate did not blunder, as femi-

nine confederates generally do. But then, unfortunately for him, there are easier things in the world than to impose upon T. & C. Bradford."

Monsieur l'Artiste, with a cigar in his mouth, was strolling backwards and forwards in front of the hotel; and, as the evening was soft and balmy, it was but natural that Mr. Bradford, on his return, should join him, and, falling into step, should stroll beside him to and fro upon the narrow pavement. They answered a prompt "*Bon soir*" to everyone who greeted them in passing, and Monsieur l'Artiste stopped twice, placidly and chattily, to light a fresh cigar.

But the street must needs have been a great deal lighter for it to be noticeable how very attentively Monsieur l'Artiste was listening all the time; and the landlord's eyes must have been much sharper and clearer to see, from his post of observation in the window of the *café*, that when his visitors said "Good night," and shook hands just out of reach of the lamp which swung above the hotel door, a paper, closely folded, passed from one hand to the other.

Next morning Monsieur l'Artiste, in his broad white hat, and with his sketching materials in

his bag, set out from San Remo by diligence, to continue his sketching tour in the Alps; and, a few hours afterwards, the English visitor, dawdling over his breakfast, with a guide-book open before him, lazily turned and sent the *garçon* to order post-horses for Grenoble.

So the little town lost these two visitors, whom she thought she had brought together, and for whom she fancied she had wiled away a few idle days.

Just one week later, Mr. Bradford again dismissed his clerks at the usual closing hour, and remained alone in his office to meet the detective whom he had sent to San Remo. He entered exactly at the appointed time, but without the broad-brimmed white hat or the sketching-block—a young man of quick, quiet manners, whose foreign accent was too slight to impede the straightforward English expression.

The interview lasted fully an hour, though both men spoke quickly and to the point; and yet, when it was over, Mr. Bradford did not hasten home to the dinner delayed so willingly and patiently by Kenneth. Leaning back in his writing-chair, his elbows on the arms, and his legs crossed, the lawyer waited, to go over

again in thought the particulars which the young detective had brought him—the particulars which, so far, were clear and complete, and could so readily be summed up thus :—

A woman, calling herself Sophie Scot, had, nearly thirty-one years ago, brought her baby to the Foundling, and pleaded for care for the child, on account of her poverty and ill-health. She had brought him from France, because his father was English, and she wished him to grow up an Englishman ; and the child, poorly supplied with everything, had no token left with him save a few leaves torn from a little pocket-book, and the daguerreotype of a man's head, supposed to be that of his father. On the paper which enfolded this, were the names Robert and Sophie Scot, written in a man's hand ; while the loose pages were evidently torn heedlessly from a pencilled diary. These had become the boy's own property, when at last he was apprenticed to a bookseller in the Borough.

The boy had never been a really troublesome child, but still he had never done much good at anything. He was constitutionally indolent and apathetic, and, besides being morbidly

dissatisfied, was still passive in anyone's hands. In appearance he had been always rather remarkable among the Foundling children, being exceedingly tall for his years, with a pale face, and dreamy, intellectual eyes; with a silent, reticent manner, which had an inexplicable touch of haughtiness in it, and hands which were white and smooth, do what he would.

The boy had been noticed much by strangers, and yet day by day he seemed to shrink more into himself, and let that moody spirit—which no kindness or companionship could eradicate—hold him captive. Not that he had been averse to companionship—on the contrary, he had always seemed to dread solitude; but his companions were always the younger children, and he seldom talked with them, or cared to hear them talk. As the only one pursuit for which he had shown any fondness had been reading, the committee, willing to follow any distinct bent of the boy's mind, had apprenticed him to a bookseller, his mental powers having been too narrow to allow them to think of any intellectual calling.

So the career of the child at the Foundling was traced to its close.

And beyond?

The bookseller in the Borough, to whom the boy had been bound apprentice, had a long story to tell. Yet it was capable of condensing itself, like all things else, in the lawyer's mind. Before half the years had passed, for which the boy's indentures were drawn, he had, one day, a large sum of money entrusted to him to deliver to his master, and from that moment he had never been seen or heard of. He had been sought, and advertised for, in vain. Under a feigned name, in this hemisphere or the other, he must be living now—if he was living at all.

And who could ever say? No advertising would bring him forward, because he knew of what he was guilty; no knowledge of his name would be a clue, because he must have discarded this name when his crime had made it dangerous; no clue was there to grasp, save the fact of the late Squire of Kingswood's having seen a young man of the age his nephew would have been, and bearing a strong resemblance to his brother; and no means of identification were

there, save that portrait and the torn leaves, which, probably, he had long ago lost or destroyed.

A nameless orphan, brought up on charity, and repaying that charity by theft; a young man who had had to hide his name, because he had made it odious to all honest ears; for such as *he*, was the brave young Squire of Kingswood to give up his wealth and his grand old home? The notion was so very much beyond absurdity that Mr. Bradford rose in the heat which it engendered, and uttered his wrath aloud.

For such as he!—a nameless villain, whose proper and fitting punishment it was to forfeit all the rights of upright, honourable men! For such as he! Pah! Young Monkton would be mad if the idea ever visited him again, even for a moment. And young Monkton certainly was not mad, so it would all end rightly now; and the time and expense of this week's search was a trifle not worth mentioning, especially for so good a cause as fixing in his ancestral home and honours a Squire so well loved as Scot Monkton. He had done his duty now; they had all done their duty, and traced the

missing man, until a huge barrier rose before them which they could not pass. And how could it be but that this barrier was a welcome sight to the man who had grown to care so well for his young client, and who knew that it was raised by no power which he could stay, and no carelessness which he could have prevented? Hotly as Mr. Bradford had at first urged Scot to let the matter rest, without diving into those forgotten years of his uncle's life, whose possible secrets he could only too well guess, his feelings had entirely changed when the marriage in San Remo had been proved to him. This missing man was then undoubtedly a Monkton, and the upright old lawyer (though sad at heart to think of it) pursued the search earnestly and keenly. But then this huge barrier arose to break the clue and make it useless; and when it showed, at the same instant, the true character of the worthless man they sought, and the futility of all further search, what wonder was it if the old man rejoiced that the future Squire of Kingswood would be an honourable gentleman, who was born to the duties and the place he filled so well?

"Scamp as this Sourdets fellow would have been," muttered Mr. Bradford, fixing that name upon him with ineffable contempt, "I daresay Mr. Monkton would still have resigned for him ; so I'm delighted that the man is hopelessly lost, even if alive ; and that thus there is no one for whom the Squire can give up the estate. The law has given it to him by right of possession, and now Fate, or something like it, has taken up the matter and obliged us to let well alone. So we will ; and I shall go down to Kingswood to-morrow, and set the young Squire's mind at ease, and hear him tell me that we have all done what we could, and that he is satisfied, and not a little proud to feel that he has acted ultra-honourably, and yet can call the old home his own after all. He is a thoroughly sensible fellow, in spite of his chimeras, and all these romantic ideas which have infected him will have been blown to cobwebs by this time to-morrow."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE Summer months had passed, and the leaves were falling softly in the October moonlight. It was late for a carriage to be driving through the woods of Kingswood, but Colonel Egerton had posted from London, and the ostler at Minton had let his postilion into the secret of a short cut to the Dower House.

The clouds, in dusky lines, sailed slowly over the face of the calm, full moon, as she brightly kissed their edges; and, while they passed, the carriage-lamps held their own small sway, throwing their light for but a tiny distance out into the fathomless darkness of the foliage, but making the stems of the silver firs stand out near and white and glistening.

"Isn't it better than coming by train, papa? I could fancy this a haunted German forest,

and that you and I were two—"Doris corrected herself gently, remembering that her companion was not Kenneth, and that she was very much too grown-up now to promulgate romantic fancies—"were going home to a moated *Schloss*, instead of our own pretty, peaceful home."

And, with the clinging tenderness of her childhood, Doris laid her cheek down upon her father's shoulder, and slipped one hand into his.

"We shall soon be at home. We are in the open park now. Look out, darling, and you will see the lights at Kingswood."

Not only did Doris press her face to the window, but, when the carriage passed near the house, and the moon shone upon its high grey walls, she put the window down, and leaned from it.

"How late we must be, father!" she exclaimed, when she drew in her head. "The house is shut up for the night, the shutters are closed, and everything is evidently asleep. I wish we had not driven past; it has made the whole place feel chilly and uninhabited."

"Very likely Mr. Monkton is abroad, dear.

Close the window. I suppose Joan is sure to be at the Dower House."

"Yes, and Kenneth!" cried Doris, all excited expectation in a moment, and remaining so until the carriage stopped before the pillared door at the Dower House, and the travellers were met by a flood of cheery lamplight.

In this light Colonel Egerton paused only a moment—a tall, thin, white-haired gentleman, with a calm, soldierly bearing, and a brave, gentle face. But Doris stood far longer, while Kenneth, half dazzled coming from the light, gazed out before him as he advanced to her, and wondered why she lingered with raised face and wide, fixed eyes.

"Doris, my darling! Oh, what a pleasure it is to see you once again!"

"Dear Kenneth, yes, it is so nice; but—listen!"

He stood to listen, but his eyes did not follow hers; they rested only on the face he loved, the bright, mischievous face of the little Doris, whose memory was linked with the holidays at Richmond; but, beyond that, the earnest, thoughtful face of the Doris who had suddenly grown up before their last parting. And no—

thing more—for those past six months had taught her no lesson which he had not taught her. Ah, how plain that was to-night!

“Who is it, Ken?”

He had both her hands clasped in his, and was waiting for her greeting, and he answered quietly, as if her earnestness and silence wrapped themselves about him too; while the music of a cornet came gliding to them on the still, moon-lit air.

“It is at the Black Birches, dear; Aunt Joan has heard it many times while she has been here. You know the old farm is very near here.”

“I—I wonder who it is,” said Doris, drawing a long, quiet breath when the music had ceased.

“Do you not know? Have we all avoided telling you?” asked Kenneth, bending to meet her rapt eyes. “Oh, yes, why should we have told you a thing so strange and inexplicable? Doris, darling, it is Mr. Monkton who is living at the Black Birches.”

“Mr. Monkton! Mr. Monkton of Kingswood?”

“Yes, dear! Kingswood is shut up.”

“We—we saw that. And Mr. Monkton is *there*, Ken?”

"Yes."

"Alone?"

"Not quite ; he has an aunt with him—a dismal little lady enough. There is no one else that I know of, save that old man who lighted a fire here on your last visit."

"What does it mean?"

"You will hear in time, darling. It was very hard to understand—just at first."

"Hark!"

Still with her hand in his, Doris stood in utter silence and stillness, listening once more.

"Oh, Ken!" she breathed very slowly. "How beautiful it is, but how sad! I wish I had not heard it."

"Do you, dear? I think it just suits the happy moonlight, and the happiness of your home-coming."

"Now, Doris," called her father from the hall, "come in, my dear. Aunt Joan is not content with that one kiss of yours, long as it was. Ah, what is that? I declare I heard Koenig play that air sixteen years ago—a favourite cornet solo of his ; a beautiful air, and finely played now, too. Bring her in, Kenneth."

"What did papa say?" asked the girl, as she lingeringly obeyed the call.

“That I was to bring——”

“No, I mean——” And Kenneth wondered why that dreamy, listening look should still dwell within her eyes——“What did he call that air?”

“He did not name it; but it is ‘The Exile’s Lament.’ Now will you take your welcome home, my darling?”

CHAPTER XV.

THE day following the arrival of Colonel Egerton and his daughter at the Dower House was Saturday, and the pleasure of visiting and investigating every corner of their new home, within and without, was still fresh and incomplete, even when night came and brought Mr. Bradford down from London, to spend the first Sunday with them. The lawyer had much to say to his old friend about the changes at Kingswood; and Doris—though, as she was sitting with Kenneth over a game of chess, she found it all in vain to try to follow the conversation—somehow managed, when the stray speeches reached her ears, to grasp and hold them.

“Change! Why, I’ll defy any of us to

imagine what a change, because he has had to give up *everything*, except his health and strength—and those will go too, if he doesn't take care. He had always an immense amount of sensitiveness under his easy manner; and I don't suppose any one of us can realise the daily and hourly forbearance he is obliged to exercise now, because of his innate pride and refinement."

"Doris, dear, is it going to be a very diplomatic move, that you hesitate so long?"

Doris, with a laugh, put her fingers on her only remaining bishop, and moved him one square.

"It is wise not to venture too much at a time, Doris."

But now her hands were folded in her lap again, and other words than Kenneth's were filling her ears.

"Yes; but the hardest of all is to suppress, in every little thing, his old tastes and habits. Why, there is not a new machine patented, or a book printed, which has a relation to farming, but his first impulse is to send for it, just as he has been used all his life to send for what he fancied. And when the remembrance comes,

and he knows it must be given up—I have seen once or twice the quiet struggle, ending, to all appearance, so easily and naturally, and I don't care to see it again."

"Check, dear, I said. Why pause so long? Don't you see that you have but one move?"

"I dare say I shall make that move you mean," said Doris, with suspicious promptness; "but most likely I could find lots of other moves, if I thought it over."

"Then hadn't you better think it over?"

"No." And Doris settled her elbow on the table, and her chin in her palm, and waited for an inevitable defeat. Still there was no need to listen to the approach of the enemy, as well as look at it, so she might as well hear what answer her father won to his last question.

"No; not a farthing. Nothing but what he earns on his own land will he touch now, or has he touched since his father's death; but, of course, as you say, the expenses consequent on seeking this mythical heir will be paid from the estate."

"Now, Doris, what do you think of your prospects?"

"Limited," returned Doris, coolly, "but not quite blighted yet. Watch my inspired move."

Mr. Bradford had risen, and was standing on the rug; and Doris, after her move, looked up at him, as if waiting for his answer to a remark some one had just made.

"Yes, indeed; the idea may well strike you, Joan—especially here to-night, where everything is bright and snug and sociable, and we make such a pleasant home-party. To think of his only home being that ugly house, and his only companion that depressing relative! I declare you've no business to put such pictures into one's head at all. Why, Doris, what a silly move, my dear! You've lost the day now, beyond all hope. Tired, eh?"

"Tired, Mr. Bradford!" cried Doris, starting up and joining him. "How could I be tired of one game?"

But Kenneth, following her with anxious eyes, though she had turned her face from him, saw in the mirror that it was grave and pale.

"It is so seldom that I can checkmate Doris," he said, in his quiet way, as he put up the chessmen, "and she is generally so angry if I do."

"Yet not to-night, eh?" asked the old lawyer, turning to scrutinise her with apparent displeasure. "This won't do, Doris, my dear; if anger is, as I understand, your native element, you must return to it."

"I will, Mr. Bradford, if Kenneth wishes it," she said, in just her old bright and gentle way; and the evening ended, as it had begun, merrily as well as happily.

* * * * *

"Oh, Ken, isn't it a beautiful world, and isn't Sunday a beautiful day? Listen!"

Doris had stopped him, with her hand upon his arm, as they walked together through the park at Kingswood.

"Yes, I am listening. I have listened for half an hour," smiled Kenneth, looking into her face, while there swept over them, and round them, and past them, the Sunday chime from the white spire among the trees.

Then Doris walked on quietly at Kenneth's side, among the gathering congregation in the churchyard, where the sunshine lay upon the quiet graves while that glad music of the Sabbath bells swept above them. With her pretty smile, Doris acknowledged the curtseys of the village

women and the bows of the village men, and her fleet, bright blush answered their glances of unconcealed admiration. Then she followed Miss Joan into the aisle, where an old man in a black gown, and evidently also in a state of expectation, waited to lead them to their seat—a square seat beside the chancel, but not curtained and separated from the rest of the congregation, as Colonel Egerton, who followed with Mr. Bradford and his son, remembered it to have been in old time.

“Why here, father?” whispered Doris, when he had ensconced himself beside her. “Isn’t this the Kingswood pew?”

“Yes, dear ; but the Dower House is Kingswood, you know. The man had orders to bring us here.”

So Doris said nothing more, only presently she raised her eyes—as softly and as brightly blue as the fair Summer sky—and looked round the church. First her gaze rested on the Misses Levey, whose seat was nearest to the Kingswood pew ; and indeed, even otherwise her gaze would almost inevitably have been arrested by them. The lofty fabrics tilted on the glossy dark plaits were certainly the two most striking

objects in the church ; but the faces with which these bonnets were presumably connected were striking too, and Doris caught herself growing rather intent and earnest in her gaze. These girls would be her neighbours and acquaintances—friends, perhaps, some day. A little involuntary sigh escaped her, as the colour rose under their cold, hard scrutiny. There was a gentleman with them, and Doris's eyes went for a moment up to his face. Kenneth had not told her of him. Hers was but a cursory glance, over in one moment, and then her eyes came back and rested upon Kenneth. Did she find a new pleasure, at that moment, in his gentle, intellectual face, and in his kind, grave smile ? Softly and shyly she slipped her hand into his.

"My dear," he whispered, just as if he had understood something she did not say, "Mr. Levey hasn't seen a young lady in the pew for so long that he is astonished, and his eyes are naturally very round, else you would think that stare ungentlemanly, wouldn't you ?"

Doris answered only with a little nod. It was not necessary to tell Kenneth that she thought it ungentlemanly even now.

"Ken, who are the quiet, handsome young

lady, and the delicate gentleman with the long fair beard? Do you see?"

"Those are Mr. and Miss Chamberlain. I thought you knew them. But suppose you ask no more questions, dear, until service is over; it will begin in a few minutes."

Probably because it felt itself so out of place upon the happy face, that frown which had greeted Kenneth's first response to her last question, had sped away quickly, and no trace of it was left when his last words were uttered. Doris was sitting thoughtfully and gravely, facing the humbler congregation in the body of the church, when, among the little groups which entered more rapidly now, there came one solitary figure, walking, without pause or hesitation, straight up the aisle, with a firm yet easy step. But the old man in the flapping gown was too quick for him. By a clever stratagem he was in advance, holding open the door of the Kingswood pew with such show and ostentation that Scot Monkton could not have taken any other seat without drawing upon himself the wonder of all the congregation.

"I think," mused Doris to herself, "he had not intended to sit here."

It was only a fancy, of course ; for Doris did not know that this little scene had been enacted every Sunday since the late Squire's death, and that the old pew-opener now had become such an adept in frustrating any possible designs of "the Squire" to evade the family prerogative in this respect, as he had evaded it in matters over which the old man had no such control, that the task would now have been hopeless.

When the service was over, Doris noticed that it was her father, and not Mr. Bradford, who waited and joined Mr. Monkton. The old lawyer, possibly with a better knowledge of Scot than his cousin possessed, walked on to the churchyard gate, where a glittering landau, bearing the lately-discovered crest of the Leveys, stood waiting for the young ladies, who dawdled near, curious as to whether they would be introduced to their new neighbours. But Mr. Bradford had evidently no such intention. He raised his hat and led Miss Joan past.

"Don't like 'em," he remarked, "and I don't agree with David about the happiness of speaking with mine enemies in the gate."

"What trains they had to their dresses, Aunt Joan! And did you see the camellia in Mr. Levey's coat?"

"Doris," called Kenneth, hurrying up, "wait, dear. I only stopped to answer a question of Mr. Levey's. Do you know, I verily believe——"

"So do I, Kenneth," put in Miss Joan, mischievously.

"I was going to say," smiled Kenneth, "that I believe he has fallen suddenly in love with Doris."

"Indeed!" observed the lawyer. "Do such things ever occur among the Jews?"

"He is very handsome," said Doris, her eyes dancing. "You are not to be compared with him, Ken."

"He throws everyone into the shade—especially Mr. Monkton."

The swift gravity which was such a peculiar feature of Doris's character, fell over her face and stirred her voice.

"Don't joke, Ken. Be strong and good and nice to me to-day. It's Sunday, and I'm going to lose you."

"But, Doris," he said, his whole face bright-

ening when she slipped her hand within his arm, "tell me what you think of Mr. Monkton. You saw him once before, you remember, when he was rich and light-hearted. And now——"

"Now he is richer still, as I count riches," she supplemented, softly.

"True, darling; and in appearance?"

"In appearance I see no change. If I were in sorrow, Ken, I—I think I could go to him and expect just the words which would cheer and comfort me most; and—and yet, if I had a good joke to tell, I should know he would enjoy it very much."

"And you thought all that would be gone?"

"I suppose I did. I thought he could not be so exactly what he was when I saw him at Richmond, before this had occurred."

"But my father says there is a great change in him, wrought by his knowledge of himself. Can you understand that?"

"I can understand that 'melancholy has not marked him for her own.'"

"It is not sorrow which breaks the heart, Doris. It is joy, I think."

"Kenneth!"

"Yes, darling," he said, answering her gaze with his own gentle smile.

"Nothing; only don't speak sadly, please, to-day."

"Nor any day, my love," he cried, taking in his the hand which lay upon his arm. "How can any sadness creep into my thoughts when they are so full of you, or into my words when they are uttered once again to you, my darling, after this long separation? No other long separation will follow now, will it? Your next tour abroad will be with me, my love."

"You can't speak Italian, Ken, and I make great blunders. We must wait several years for me to study. See, papa has joined Aunt Joan now; let us wait for them. Oh! Ken, just look at the beauty of the Autumn woods, with the sunlight on them! What a day it is! I feel as if I wanted to hold it that it should not go. To-morrow comes the workaday world again, and you will go, and I shall have to be so decorous and so formal to receive visitors."

"I don't think you need, dear," laughed Kenneth: "you will do very well as you naturally are."

But when the Monday came, these anticipated

calls were evidently forgotten. Mr. Bradford had spent the Sunday evening and night at the Black Birches; and now, after an early luncheon, Colonel Egerton had driven him in to Minton, where he wished to see a client before returning to town. Kenneth was to take a later train, and would be at Richmond quite as soon. And now he and Doris, after strolling through the garden and the shrubbery, had ensconced themselves—with an eye rather to comfort than appearance—on the low, moss-grown wall which separated the grounds of the Dower House from that long sloping meadow through which the Larch Walk led down to the river.

“Compare this, Doris, with the garden in Gordon Square.”

“No injustice, if you please, Ken,” returned Doris, lazily. “For a solitary little orphan garden, adopted by a grim old brick-and-mortar race, it did its duty very brightly. How many a Summer day I have sat outside Aunt Joan’s windows, and wondered whether those trees ever had had a beautiful country baby-home, and fretted for it, or could only remember their town schools; and whether the birds came and made them jealous with little poems of the

natural, beautiful life of a forest tree; and whether they found it harder to bud and do their duty cheerfully after that; and whether we——”

“Yes; and then?”

“Oh! I expect you generally appeared round a corner then,” corrected Doris, with a laugh. “I shall have some more happy hours under the awning on the old portico yet. Ah! Ken, why did you let me look up just then? That was a magpie flying over us.”

“Do you know what will bring you up to town first, Doris?” asked the young man, too much in earnest to notice the reproof. “You will come first to see my play; don’t you feel that you will, my darling?”

“Yes,”—and never could Doris have understood, if she had tried, why, as she spoke, she should have laid her hand upon his, with a sympathy which she fancied was for herself, and he fancied was for him—“but, Kenneth, why hurry that it may be next Summer? Think how tame your future efforts will be, if you overwork yourself now.”

“Oh, no fear!” he smiled, pushing the hair from his narrow face, as if it exhibited Hercu-

lean prowess. "Even if *Marie Antoinette* comes back to me again, my new drama is sure to succeed."

Suddenly at this instant an extraordinary and unnatural decorum took possession of Doris. Her arms had been folded behind her head, against a low old walnut-tree, and her white gipsy hat hung upon one of its branches; but now she put on the hat, and folded her hands in her lap, wishing devoutly that she could be walking upright in a pathway, or sitting, as a grown-up person ought to sit, in the arbour behind her, with some lace-work or a book of poems. Yet it was only a young man alone who came from the Larch Walk just then, and stopped opposite her, with a smile and an extended hand.

"For fear you might be otherwise unaware of the fact, Miss Egerton," said Scot, after his greeting to them both "I had better tell you that this is my call of ceremony. I really was coming to the house, to ask for you and Colonel Egerton in proper style; but, as you cannot guess how long it took me to make up mind to the ceremony, you won't be able to guess how pleasant it is to find you here."

Before Doris had said all she intended to say

so neatly, about her father's absence and her own delight in seeing Mr. Monkton, she was aware that he was settled quite comfortably against the wall near her, and did not at all seem to mind whether she got through her little speeches decorously, or broke down in them, and—it was much more agreeable that he should not. But she had an uncompromising notion that it was imperative upon her to allow no silence to fall upon them just at first, so she ventured a prim remark upon the beauty of the view, and made up her mind not to forgive Kenneth all the evening, unless he took up the subject and enlarged learnedly upon it. But this was the very first experience Kenneth had had of Doris's assumption, and it took him so completely by surprise that his conversational powers were in abeyance. So—Doris remembered this afterwards with a laugh against herself—there had fallen another ominous silence, and she could not think of any other “society” remark. She turned and glanced at her visitor in a spirit of despairing scrutiny. How young and ignorant he would think her, that she could not entertain better ! He looked very much at his ease, half sitting on the wall

there so near her, and not at all as if he minded the ignominious failure of her commendable efforts. And just as her bright and wilful eyes unconsciously questioned him on this, his met them; and—Doris never could either remember or guess how it had happened—a laugh broke in both.

“I was thinking,” she said—and the primness and the stiffness and the efforts had all dissolved like morning mist—“how unlike you are to what I had fancied you; while I stood and listened to your cornet in the moonlight, the night we came. You were playing ‘The Exile’s Lament,’ and it was so sad.”

“Friday night? I remember. My third valve persisted in sticking, so I left off.”

“Papa says, whenever he heard Koenig play that air, he felt the tears come into his eyes; just think—a man’s eyes!”

“I should rather like to know where Koenig used to stop to wipe his lip. And so of course you fancied me a broken-hearted exile, with a chronic lament.”

Doris’s hat, being untied, slipped so uncomfortably on one side that—very naturally—she took it off and held it in her lap. Of course

then she could see better whether Mr. Monkton was laughing at her. No ; certainly not. Doris, inexperienced as she might be, like a true woman, possessed that tact and sympathy which can read the subtle indications of pain or pleasure. She understood why it came more easily to him to answer her thus, just as she was—a few minutes afterwards—to understand why his glance, as he lingered there, rested anywhere rather than on Kingswood. And the knowledge shattered every trace of petty formality, and formed itself into a corner-stone on which the future was to build.

There was no unpleasant halt in their conversation now, though there was many a pause—what but the very shallowest talk has no such pause ? And the Autumn afternoon was passing by them unawares. There fell the shadow of the half-clothed walnut-tree on Scot's handsome sunburnt face ; and the brim of Kenneth's straw hat shaded his ; but between them both, Doris sat in the full light of the lowering sun, her face so delicately smooth and soft and fair, the dainty colour in her cheeks coming and going as she spoke, and smiled, and listened ;

and the sunbeams passing brightly through her hair.

"Bradford, how does the new drama get on?"

It was not an unpremeditated question, nor asked in any mere spirit of curiosity. Kenneth understood this in a moment, as he had always understood Scot Monkton's sympathy, and he told him of his work just as he would have told Doris.

"You think it more likely to succeed, now that you are writing it without the fetters of history or tradition?"

"I trust so," said Kenneth, his eyes wandering dreamily across the wooded hills; "it is a picture of true human life."

"If so," put in Doris, with a smile, "the laughter and the tears are very near together, Ken."

"And with real humour and simple pathos for the moving springs, I must touch all hearts, must I, Doris?"

"Without stirring passion?" asked Scot, with an earnestness of which he looked unconscious. "Can he portray real life without that, Miss Egerton?"

"No, I suppose not—for the stage," she said, thoughtfully.

"But you think it can be managed off the stage?" he asked, and, though he smiled while he waited for her answer, it came as gravely as if a whole life had depended upon it.

"I—hope so."

"After all," observed Kenneth, meditatively, "I suppose the one thing most important is the harmony of the whole."

"That must exist, if the watchword be Duty."

"But," said Doris, wondering at Scot's tone, "there are men who live unhappy lives for the very sake of duty."

"Unhappy, yes; but in the end there will have been harmony, I fancy. At any rate," he added, with a laugh, "it should be so on the stage, and that is all we are speaking of. Look, Miss Egerton; surely those are the last of the martins. Prepare for Winter now."

"I never prepare for Winter," smiled Doris, following his eyes.

"And you are right and wise," he said; and then turned away, amused at himself for thinking anything of such light words.

There fell another silence upon them then, and just at that minute an open carriage rolled along the highway near them, and its occupants, unnoticed themselves, scanned very curiously the three figures on the wall. A few minutes afterwards Doris was summoned to the house to receive her visitors. Mr. Levey and his sisters had not been long in the pleasant sunlit drawing-room—he hovering near his hostess, and they doing their best to entertain Mr. Monkton, and bestowing a little attention on Kenneth, and a great deal of scrutiny upon their young entertainer,—when Miss Chamberlain was announced.

Miss Bradford went forward eagerly to receive the grave, quiet lady who entered, and the Misses Levey turned their eyes sharply from her to Scot; but Doris, when she had coldly given her hand to this solitary visitor, stood back, and fell at once an easy prey to the charms thrown out so persistently this afternoon by Mr. Bernard Levey. Perhaps in nervous avoidance of Margaret Chamberlain, and perhaps even in amusement, Doris was drawn into an animated discussion with him, while Rose slipped out of the group, and tried to

wean Scot from his place beside the couch where Miss Bradford sat with Margaret.

"Oh! auntie," whispered Doris, standing for a few minutes opposite her aunt's chair, when they were left together again; and then sitting down upon the floor and laying her head in Miss Joan's lap, as she had been used to do when but a tiny child, "I ought not to be grown up. I am not worthy to have any responsibility; I do nothing well, or wisely, or kindly. I'm—I'm only fit to be your child, as I used to be, Aunt Joan. Oh, take me back!"

"My darling," said the old lady, stroking the girl's bent head with infinite tenderness, "it will all be easy presently. You did very well. I have only one word to say, love—let no unworthy feeling stand between you and Margaret Chamberlain. She is one whom it will do you good to know, and one for whose friendship you may be grateful."

"But, Aunt Joan," said Doris, raising her face, and betraying its pride and astonishment, "she broke my brother's heart—do you forget?"

"She refused him," returned Miss Joan,

quietly. "If it had happened, Doris, that you could not have loved Kenneth well enough to marry him, do you think I should have been proud and cold and disagreeable to you?"

"Oh! auntie, you never could be; but—indeed it is different. She—she made Arthur believe she loved him; at least—I have heard papa say how she always seemed happier with him; and—and of course he would not have taken it so to heart if he had been prepared."

"You are little more than a child even yet, Doris," said Miss Joan, smiling gently, "else you would acknowledge it wisest to leave each heart to its own bitterness, because we can never judge for each other. When you feel tempted to be strict upon anyone, dear, be strict upon yourself—will you try that? Here comes Kenneth back from the gate; go out and meet him, and let the sunshine come down into your eyes again."

It was evening-time, and the carriage was waiting at the gate for Kenneth—the carriage could very well wait while the last words were repeated, and the last pressure given to the lingering hands.

"Kenneth, can you understand why Miss

Chamberlain refused to marry my brother Arthur, and so drove him from home and England?"

"Of course I can, my dear," said Kenneth—too happy in his own successful love to entertain the possibility of any girl's voluntarily dashing from her lips the like delicious draught—"she must have loved some one else."

Even there, in the gloom of the portico, he saw the shadow falling on the face he held so near his own, and across his heart there fell a dawning of what the words *might* have meant—even to him. And Doris was thinking now of others besides her brother. She recalled Scot Monkton's pleasant courtesy to Margaret, when she herself had turned from her in her own house; she could even recall, with a marvellous clearness and distinctness, the few kind and generous words he had said of Miss Chamberlain on that day she had first met him.

"I see," she said, very quietly, "I see now."

* * * * *

That evening, at Osborne House, Bernard Levey and his sisters had well, though not too mercifully, discussed their afternoon visit. But Bernard did not tell that he had had again to

undergo the mortification of being thrown into the shade by Scot Monkton, even though Scot had walked up from his farm, while Bernard had driven over in style. And, though Rose and Violet were equally uncomfortable, neither would, or even could, explain to herself exactly how it was.

“Miss Egerton is a thorough little aristocrat, and a very pretty and unusually pleasant one—” So Bernard had at last dismissed his share of the discussion, finishing more a thought than a subject of conversation.

“She evidently has that young London lawyer devoted to her. She will not surely attempt to make mischief between other people in the neighbourhood—” So Violet finished her thought; but Rose left hers unfinished, and caught up the threads in a dream.

In this dream Scot Monkton stood beside her, looking up to Kingswood, where she saw that some one stood in the open doorway beckoning to him. Some one—but who? To learn this, Rose, in her dream, shaded her eyes from the strong sunshine pouring down upon them. It was Doris Egerton. Was she not there in the full light, coming forward a little now,

until it was quite easy to see her? Doris? No; it was Margaret Chamberlain—Margaret herself, with her slow, soft step, and that look of trouble which was always in her eyes. No, the figure was too small for Margaret—far, far too small; and it had no bright hair like Doris's, and no——

Rose raised her head in the sunshine, and took the shading hand from her eyes. There was *no* figure in the open doorway now, and she was alone upon the slope, waiting to see if Scot would enter.

Then, quite suddenly, Rose awoke; to find her pillow wet with tears.

CHAPTER XVI.

SCOT did not take the direct road along the Larch Walk, after he had left the Dower House; nor did he turn to the right and cross the ornamental bridge in the park. He chose the longest way of all, and, passing out into the turnpike road, followed that until he reached a narrow lane which led straight down, at right angles with the road, to the old wooden foot-bridge, which crossed the river behind the Green Pits.

As he reached the corner of the lane, he was aware of a man's figure coming towards him on the high road, but coming towards him apparently without any definite purpose, idly and listlessly strolling, as if to enjoy in a languid and leisurely manner, the last afternoon glimpse of Autumn sunshine.

"I am not sorry," mused Scot to himself, with that swift warmth of laughter in his eyes, as he turned aside, "to be able to avoid the elegant greeting of that artificial rascal; the luxury will keep. Now that he has returned to the neighbourhood, I may expect another visit. He *is* rather a heavy fellow, I must own (the hugeness of his shoulders equalling that of his intellect) but a few more of his dastardly insinuations will tempt me to forget the fact, and dismiss him with an act of gentle manipulation. But"—with a cheery whistle for his dogs, and a comical glance down upon the old farm—"I hope he will never tempt me to act so in my own house. Monarch, what is it?"

But the dog, after feeling his way deliberately through the hedge, had raced across the sloping meadow without a pause.

"Curious," said Scot, with a smile, as he stepped upon the unsteady old wooden bridge; "but Monarch has always some method in his madness, so. I suppose he scented a strange dog. I wish he hunted human rascals off the premises as promptly as he hunts canine ones."

"Wheer's Monarch, sir? Master, wheer's Monarch?"

The panting questions came from Liath, who made the bridge shake as he hurried up to his master. Scot, leaning against the wooden rail, and watching the man with a strange look upon his face—as if no trouble, be it what it would, could come quite unexpectedly to him again—explained his dog's last vagary.

“Thank ye, sir,” said Liath, turning away as if he suddenly found *his* part of the story hard to tell. “He's done what he could—he allus does, good old fella—but it's too late. Theer's bin some strange dogs 'mong the sheep, sir, and we've lost nigh upon twenty.”

“That leaves us—how many, Liath?”

The man turned round again, and raised his eyes in astonishment to his master's face; but, for all their shrewdness and anxiety, it needed something beyond to read the subtle feelings there.

With Liath the worst was always over when he had told his master; and so Scot, as he turned towards the pasture-meadows, expected the old man to come with him cheerfully; but Liath made a dead pause when they had crossed the bridge.

“I'm goin' to the cow 'us, sir,” he said, in a

voice which he fancied was quite cool and comfortable, "then to the Green Pits, and then to the river meada. I'm—a little afeard as there's some ugly blisters to-day on Daisy's tongue, and—I dunna know but what Ed'art and me can see some on th' 'ind legs o' two o' the new 'eifers, just at their 'eels."

"I see," said Scot, but with only a slight glimpse of that quietness which in him was always born of strong emotion. "What a fool I've been to stay away so long! What have you done?"

"I've sent Ed'art into Minton for the vet, sir, and I've shringed their fit, and put clean litter in their sheds. We'd very nearly 'scaped this fut-and-mouth disease—hadna we, sir?" added Liath, with an air as briskly jubilant now as if his late information had been founded upon the remarkable health of the entire herd.

"Those that are in the field must have hurdles round them," said Scot, speaking faster than his wont, "and they must have potash in their water. See about that, and I will go and fix the hurdles."

Just as Scot turned, and Liath stood puzzled for a moment, hesitating to speak, there came

running towards them from the farm the young girl who was Miss Windish's only prop and stay within doors.

Would the master come in for a minute, as he was wanted particularly?

"Could anything have bin luckier?" muttered Liath, looking after his master. "I'd have had to tell him as we hadna 'urdles to use. What's the use o' allus havin' to remind him o' the good a bit o' ready money 'd do us? We havna got it, and theer's an end of it—whether the cattle live or die, and whether the sheeps eat or not eat. And so," ended Liath's thought, cheerfully, as he walked on, "we may jest be thankful that the master's 'ands ain't pieces o' white wax, as is ne'er a bit o' good, and that, for all his larnin' and his old grand life, he's jest the first allus to put his own showlder to the wheel."

The shoulder which Scot was just then called to put to the wheel was the metaphorical shoulder of a sturdy patience. Miss Michal, who had sent for him so hastily, was exhibiting before him, in the kitchen, various articles which she had purchased at a sale, where she had spent a short day in the greatest perturba-

bation lest any one else should step in before her in the winning of a real bargain.

"But did we need these fenders, Aunt Michal?" inquired Scot, gazing without much rapture on the articles in question.

"Do you think," said Miss Michal, with symptoms of an approaching depression, "that I could let them go to anyone else, when they went so very cheap? It would have been a real sin. And see that little bed, Scot—only forty shillings, all complete! I never in all my life saw such a bargain before. The auctioneer himself said he was giving it away."

"What a generous fellow! But who's to sleep in it, Aunt Michal? Liath is the smallest person in the house, but even *he* is not small enough for that toy."

"Liath!" cried Miss Windish, with a prompt display of tears. "What are you talking of? It is a child's bedstead, Scot, and has a real feather bed. You'll want a child's bed some day—and just think how cheap it was."

"I will," said Scot, in his pleasant way. "I'll think of that and nothing more, Aunt Michal."

And she could not see that there was any effort in his dismissal of another thought.

"I've one or two more things to show you," resumed Miss Michal, gleefully rubbing her limp hands together in her triumph; "but I mustn't keep you now, because you are wanted in the drawing-room"—Miss Windish, following Scot's lead, gave to the old rooms at the Black Birches the names which came most familiarly to her lips; and the low, ugly rooms which, until six months ago, had been known only as the "parlour" and the "best parlour," were now called promiscuously "drawing-room" and "library," "dining-room" and "morning-room."

"I'm glad he's come," said Scot. "Beautiful!"—this word of praise was bestowed upon a peculiar slip of carpet just then exhibited—"It's the veterinary surgeon from Minton."

But the visitor Scot found in the "best parlour" was so little a surgeon—veterinary or otherwise—that before he had been ten minutes in his company Scot's old wound was open and rasped, and all its old aching brought back.

But who could guess it, as he stood there at the window, with his back to the light, his eyes rather quizzical than otherwise, as they rested on his cousin's angry face?

"This is the first time I have seen you, Stanley," he said, when this harsh probing was all over, "since we were boys, and you used to spend your holidays at Kingswood; don't you think we may just as well make it a pleasant meeting as a disagreeable one? It must be short, of course, because I shall not ask you to stay, as you call my house 'a beastly hole.'"

Even that glimpse of pride could not make the tone unpleasant, but the voice which answered was more than unpleasant in its blunt heartlessness.

"I call the place simply what it is, and any man would be a fool to live here voluntarily."

"All right," said Scot, quietly; "here's the fool. Go on; let's have the old story over again by all means, if it amuses you."

"You have no right—I will assert, in any Court of England, that you've no right—to leave our family estate empty and unoccupied."

"The estate is well taken care of," put in Scot. But the interruption was unnoticed.

"And bring upon us these sneaks and cheats, who would pass themselves off as legal heirs of Kingswood."

"You have been strangely misinformed," said Scot; "only one man attempted the deceit of passing himself off as an heir, and his fraud was seen through immediately by Mr. Bradford."

"And," continued Stanley Monkton again, without noticing the interruption, "it is rank injustice to myself to drag in this nonsensical mythical claim."

"I can hardly imagine," said Scot, moving from his position, and walking slowly to and fro before the windows, without glancing again towards his cousin—a tall, dark-haired young man, with features which, though regular and handsome, were harsh and cold and hard—"that you yourself, in my place, would not have acted as I did. I saw nothing else to do. However long I had unconsciously appropriated another man's property, I could not *consciously* do it; and this was my own. True I might possibly have earned a livelihood in town, for which—the thought makes me smile—my old life and college education might have fitted me better; but it is slow and tedious work, they say, to find employment when you are vague as to what duties you can undertake, and have

served no apprenticeship to any ; so we came here."

"We!" echoed Stanley, with more alarm even than derision. "Have you dragged a wife down to poverty too?"

Scot's arms were folded, so the tightened grasp of his fingers was not seen. Without pausing in his measured walk, he raised his head with a laugh.

"I am not married. Only my own life stands between you and Kingswood ; but unfortunately it is a very healthy life, Stanley."

"It's a life you will soon shorten for yourself, if you keep up this ridiculous whim," was the muttered retort. "Think it over like a man of sense," he added, considering it wiser to change his tone after that searching glance into his cousin's face. "Why should you deny yourself in this way, for a person who most probably does not even exist ; and, if he does, has never known, or even guessed, that he had a possible claim to any property ? He would not actually know what to do with it if he had it, and would be a much happier and better fellow left as he is, than put here to squander a great fortune, and disgrace a good name."

It was real knowledge of his cousin's nature—whether acquired by himself or not—which prompted Stanley Monkton to put the matter in this light; but yet it won no different answer.

"My father left me in trust to make the restitution," Scot said, as if the wider questions of honour and justice were all included in that simple fact.

"Well, and you have tried and failed. Don't be a fool any longer. Go back to Kingswood, and give us all our old positions."

"Yours has never changed," said Scot, coldly. "There may be still only one life in your way. It makes no difference in your position, or home, or income."

"I say it does," cried Stanley, losing the slight control he had put upon his temper; "though *how* is no business of yours, and we need not discuss it. But, by Heaven, if you persist in this idiocy, I shall come myself to Kingswood!"

"By what right?" asked Scot, still without pausing in his walk.

"By the right of possession, which you ignored," cried Stanley, roughly; "though, if I

chose, I could come by another. Do you think there would be much difficulty in proving you deranged, while you live and work here, when you've no earthly reason to believe any other man lives who has a claim upon your father's estate?"

"I have thought of that," said Scot, pausing for the first time, and glancing from the window with a grave look in his eyes, though a smile was on his lips. "You might make a capital case: Let me tell you of one witness who would be invaluable to you. He's a Frenchman of nomadic tastes, though his nationality has been a good deal worn from him by—I should say, though this is only a guess—years of Bush vagabondism. Ah! I see, you have yourself heard of such a man. Well, he is in this neighbourhood now—yes, that also you know, I see."

"I should have no difficulty in finding all the witnesses I needed," returned Stanley Monkton, his cold tone failing to hide his wrath; "but I hope such a proceeding will never be necessary. You will, of course, soon quit this life of degradation."

"I do not think it degradation," said Scot, quietly, "I think that

'Honour and shame from no condition rise;
Act well your part—there all the honour lies.'

As I am mad enough to believe *that*, Stanley, a jury would scarcely need further proof."

"I cannot make it out," fumed Mr. Monkton, rising and hastily buttoning his overcoat; "you never used to be a fool, yet this is the essence of folly as well as gross injustice to me."

"That I certainly cannot see," said Scot, in those tones of quiet haughtiness which were not new to his cousin, whose youthful intercourse had been a series of mean encroachments on the nobler nature. "If, as you expect, we find no Monkton with a nearer claim than mine, you have still only your old task of awaiting my death. And, as it is not likely that I shall—as you so moderately put it—drag a wife down to poverty, only one life will be in your way instead of, as it might have been, an unlimited number of healthy sons and grandsons."

"And, if I die as soon as yourself, of what benefit to me will be your resolution?"

"Not much," returned Scot, answering composedly this selfish idea. "'Thersites' body is as good as Ajax', when neither is alive!" But," he added, with the cordiality which so rarely

cost him an effort, "what's the use of our meeting for the first time for more than ten years, and talking of mutual decease? Shake hands, Stanley, and break bread with me in this 'beastly hole!'"

"Not I," returned Stanley, roughly, "nor shall I come again to urge upon you the exercise of a little common-sense. I shall use more efficient means next time. I won't have my name made ridiculous by you, nor will I blindly give up my right as heir-presumptive to Kingswood."

In another minute he had taken his seat in the hired dog-cart which had waited for him, and was driving over the bridge; while Scot hurried to the river meadow to visit his sick cattle.

The dog-cart had proceeded only about a mile on its way to Minton when it overtook Monsieur Sourdets, walking with a lagging and apparently tired step in the road. Stanley Monkton passed on for a few yards, and then pulled up his horse, and spoke to the man behind.

"Go back and ask that gentleman if he would like a seat."

Monsieur Sourdets accepted the offer with his

blandest smile, and prepared—but with remarkable slowness—to mount to the back of the vehicle.

Mr. Monkton, turning half round, proposed the vacant seat beside himself; and Monsieur Sourdet, without further pressing, took that.

The man, a groom from the White Lion Hotel in Minton, sitting with his back to the two gentlemen, folded his arms and looked about him; taking refuge, as he could not whistle, in minutely marking the time, and congratulating himself that *he* could have taken the mare in exactly one-fourth of the time, if he had been allowed to drive.

But, even if he had listened, what could he have learnt from the half-whispers which now and then passed his careless ears?

“Yes; it was considerate of you to write and tell me how things were going on here. I saw the writer had an interest in our family, though of course I could not imagine who the deuce he was.”

“I thought it high time for one of his own name to interfere—at any rate to be made fully aware how matters stood; and so, knowing your appointment was in Oporto, I wrote there.

I felt sure the letter would bring you, though written by a stranger."

Of these remarks, interspersed with observations on the road and the weather, the groom could have made but little, even if he had heard them; and he dismounted, and went to the horse's head, when Mr. Monkton stopped to let down the gentleman to whom he had given a seat.

"I think I was prepared," Stanley Monkton said, while he slipped into his waistcoat pocket a written address, "for my cousin's obstinacy; but I had no idea I should feel it such a thoroughly hopeless task to convince him. He was as firm as a rock to-day."

"So far," remarked the Frenchman, pausing to speak from the steps of the vehicle, "this life at the farm has had, perhaps, sufficient novelty to make it tolerable; and possibly he has had as yet—I do not know, for I have been very little in the neighbourhood lately—none of the losses and failures to which an inexperienced farmer is liable. You will see that his opinions will veer swiftly enough when things go against him."

"I do not believe things ever *will* go against him," returned Mr. Monkton, moodily. "Everything always went for, instead of against, him—I mean up to the time he took this freak. I verily believe he will flourish in that hole, just as he flourished at Kingswood; and that things will prosper for him even in that vile place."

"I do not believe so at all."

The Frenchman's tone seemed to strike his companion, during that moment before he turned his head to meet the parting smile and remark.

"We shall have rain, I fear. The air is chilly, too. Let me advise you to drive fast, Mr. Monkton. I shall soon reach my inn—very soon. Accept many thanks for the accommodation. Good evening."

"Then I shall hear from you?"

Mr. Monkton asked this, leaning sideways towards Monsieur Sourdét, with his left hand upon the back of the seat.

"I find the air suits me, so I shall stay in this neighbourhood at present."

This reply of Monsieur Sourdét's sounded a

little irrelevant; but evidently something by which it was accompanied served Stanley Monkton as a key.

CHAPTER XVII.

“DORIS, put on your hat, my dear, and come with me to the Black Birches.”

“Do you really mean it, papa?”

“Why not? My solitary visits have not returned the call with which Miss Windish favoured you.”

“When she shed tears over my loneliness,” laughed Doris; “my loneliness with you, papa—just think of it!”

“Not I! Where’s your hat?”

“Is that all I need? Am I to come as I am?”

“Why not? Let me look at you.”

He had found her reading in the porch, but she had put aside her book and risen at his call; and so, as if the form must be gone through, he ran his tranquil blue eyes over her

dress. No verdict was needed beyond their pleasant glance, and so Doris—knowing that the dress she wore was a favourite with her father, and quite untroubled by the fact that she had a varied selection of ribbons upstairs, from which she might have chosen gayer adornments than the bunch of purple heartsease at her breast—tied on her hat, and took up the leather gloves which had lain beside her on the seat.

“You were so particular that we should go in state to Osborne House and Comely Place, father. Is this to be a very different first call?”

They were sauntering down the Larch Walk, and Doris had turned her gaze suddenly from the old farm to ask this question.

“My dear little girl,” Colonel Egerton said, “I want you to forget for to-day that there exists such a word as ‘state;’ and be a homely, pleasant friend to the young Squire.”

So he bade her, in the simple kindness of his heart; and, in the still more simple kindness of hers, she obeyed him beyond the letter.

It was more than a cheerful call which Colonel Egerton and his daughter paid at the Black Birches; it was positively a merry one; and

even Miss Michal waxed lymphatically droll when she found her visitors so bent upon making much of her.

They were all idling about the low old-fashioned drawing-room, Miss Michal presiding anxiously over an impromptu tea, when Doris rose in her place at the window, and stood looking out upon the river.

"How beautiful it is," she said, "with the sunset light upon it!"

"Miss Egerton," spoke Scot, from his place opposite to her, "if you like to see the sunset light upon the river, you should come to the hillock beyond the Green Pits."

"May I, papa?" inquired Doris, turning without a moment's hesitation.

"Certainly, if Mr. Monkton will undertake the charge."

"Then you will not come yourself, Colonel Egerton?" asked Scot.

"No, thank you. If Miss Windish consents, she and I will stroll to meet you; I do not attempt climbing now. Miss Michal, do you remember what a climber your hus—Mr. Hawthorne was?"

"No," said Miss Michal, with a vigorous

shake of her head, and an appearance of anything rather than forgetfulness, "I don't at all remember. I *won't* remember," she added, presently, with renewed briskness; and then she sighed heavily, and betrayed symptoms of rising tears. So Colonel Egerton, not by any means for the first time, had to relinquish his effort to lead her to think, if not to speak, of her married life.

"If you young people do not hurry, we shall be first at the Green Pits."

So it was the father himself who hastened them away together.

"It seems curious to call that little valley the Green Pits," said Scot, as they walked slowly on along the path beside the river. "Do you see it—the hollow behind that rising ground on the river side, between it and the slope of the woods? The cultivators of the Black Birches have always used it as their stackyard. It hardly needed the wall to make it a perfect area."

"It is an ugly name for your stackyard," commented Doris, as she lightly ascended the hilly ground between it and the river; "but it is in a very pretty place; and how well stocked

it is! What are those two curious old wooden buildings near the gate?"

"Dilapidated barns. Aunt Michal believes, Miss Egerton, that some day the Green Pits will open from below, and swallow up the whole of my riches—represented by those piles of hay and corn—at a gulp."

"But are there really pits below?"

He laughed into her wondering eyes.

"No one would have used it as a stackyard if there had been. The legend is too old to trace, but I believe that some two hundred years ago all these little natural valleys were called green pits—poetical nomenclature, isn't it?—and the name has clung to this one."

They had reached the highest part of the meadow now, and Doris was leaning on the gate in the hedge which bounded it, just under the three birches, and looking down; her eyes resting first where the crimson light rose and fell upon the rippling water, then on the Dower House upon the height, and then on the farm below. Scot leaned upon the gate too, and his eyes followed hers; and yet it seemed that the only picture which they saw was the girl who stood under the trees, while they shed their

golden leaves around her softly and caressingly.

"Seen in this light," said Doris, with the childlike naturalness which essentially belonged to her, and which made her always touch delicately and pleasantly on any subject, "our homes look as warm and bright and pleasant without, as our love and sympathy can make them within."

He understood even more than the words might have conveyed, yet he did not try to answer, as he stood beside her, looking from her home, on its sunny height, down to the old farm where lay the slanting rays of sunset. But through all the struggles and the passion of the time to come he never forgot the calm, delicious peace of those few moments. Easily at last, by the most natural interruption in the world, the silence was broken. Liath came from the meadow behind, leading an unbroken young horse, whose nose touched his knees as he stepped daintily back from Liath's guidance.

"Cert'nly the owld lad's in him to-day, sir," observed Liath, after his salute to Miss Egerton—a salute which amused Scot, for he saw that there was pleasure with the respect, and that these two had met before—"he aschally walked

over th' 'urdles like a joke, and one of his leps, afore I caught him, must have bin nigh upon thirty foot. What we're to do with him I canna see, yet he's jest a picter, sir."

"Are you quite well, Liath?" asked Doris, when Scot had laid his hand upon the glossy black coat of the young horse, and was trying to tempt him on.

"Quite well in myself, thank ye, miss; but there's a scruciable pain in my back gin'rally now, as puts me out, coz I can't understand it. I know what riz it this time," he muttered, as she stood still beside him; "it was yesterdy, when I see'd th' 'ounds in full swing, and the gen'men 'thout the master. If he 'ud jest——"

"So I will," put in Scot, turning to show that he heard the mumbled remark. "I am only waiting till I have broken Vaulter."

"Is the name of that horse Vaulter?" asked Doris, watching Liath lead him off.

Scot answered, with a laugh:

"The colt was sold to me as Voltaire, but I have never heard Liath mention him but as Vaulter; and the name does very well."

"It suits him too," smiled Doris, wondering

whether this young untrained horse was the sole remnant of the famous Kingswood stud, of which her father had told her. And it was this very thought which framed her answer to his remark—"You ride, Miss Egerton, I know."

"Sometimes. I wish it were oftener; but papa prefers walking, and Kenneth" (with a fresh little laugh) "prefers strolling or sitting. I have no one else to take me."

"But, as I have seen, Colonel Egerton does not object to your riding only with a groom; and I heard Mr. Levey beg that he might sometimes accompany you."

"Yes, I must not forget that," said Doris, with a grave shake of her head. "He says that Hero—that's my horse, Mr. Monkton, such a beautiful roan!—is not safe for me, and he called her a 'brilliant fencer.' What does that mean?"

"He means," Scot said, coolly changing the pronoun, "to recommend you a creature who takes more kindly to the highways of life; and, following the well-beaten track, keeps a well-defined hedge on either side."

"But any horse can take me *so*—steadily and slowly along the turnpike road," observed

the girl, simply ; and Scot returned—still more simply, to all seeming—

“It is the easier and plainer way.”

“If we had been talking in metaphor, Mr. Monkton,” said Doris, presently (so brightly and daringly fanciful was the girl’s nature, and so accustomed was she to the romance of her post-lover, that imagery came natural to her even in ordinary conversation), “we should have praised Mr. Levey for his preference for the plain highway.”

“Yes, if we had been talking in metaphor.

“The Miss Leveys ride a great deal, Miss Egerton, as well as their brother,” added Scot, presently, “so you will have plenty of invitations. Miss Chamberlain never rides.”

“If she did——” began Doris, and then stopped.

The young man turned, and saw the proud, impatient look, fleeting as it was.

“Margaret Chamberlain is my great friend,” he said.

“She——” Doris had nearly explained Margaret’s claim to her displeasure, but corrected herself. “She has such a provoking air of

mystery about her," the girl added, staying beside the hedge to eat a sloe, which she could not bear; "you know she has."

"If so, it is the mystery of good thoughts and words and acts."

"I wish," said Doris, while she stood deliberately to turn a fungus with her foot, and looked down upon it, "that everybody would not talk to me of Miss Chamberlain; I—I grow angry and wrong when I speak of her."

"But, if you would think——"

She interrupted Scot petulantly, as she raised her head.

"It is when I think that I hate her most. Please don't ask me to think."

"Mr. Monkton, how sad it was that you should lose all those cattle and sheep just in one week!"

When Doris broke the silence with this irrelevant remark they had reached the path between the Black Birches and the river, and it was just in the momentary pause which followed, that the eyes of both chanced to rest upon a figure walking, with a heavy, swinging step, along the wider, well-formed path upon the other side of the water.

"Monsieur Sourdets seems to appreciate a sunset view in the park," said Scot, composedly; and then he answered Doris's question just as composedly, and told her the amount of his loss both in cattle and sheep.

After she had discussed this, gently and sympathetically, there seemed to come back to her his first speech.

"Monsieur Sourdets," she repeated, reflectively. "Is he the foreigner who is staying now at Anna Wakeley's cottage?"

"Yes. Then even *you* have heard of him, Miss Egerton?"

With perfect distinctness Doris recollected the dislike the woman had shown for the foreigner, when her husband had bidden her go home and prepare for him on the day of the late Squire's funeral: but of course she could not mention this, and so recall that day to Scot. She turned the subject aside, with that rare and delicate tact which can flourish only in "a heart at leisure from itself"; and when, ten minutes afterwards, Scot opened the gate at the Black Birches, she was chatting gaily of her foreign tour, not—as the old lawyer had curtly advised her never to do—"grouping her

pictures with one I," but merrily comparing notes with Mr. Monkton.

"I should think, Miss Egerton," dolefully remarked Miss Michal, when the young people had joined her and Colonel Egerton in the garden, "that you are heartily sick by now of looking across the turnip-fields."

"I'm like a certain great poet in one respect, Miss Windish," said Doris, her face bright with unfeigned enjoyment, "I'm *very* fond of turnips."

"At any rate you must go home in this shawl of mine, or we shall have you bronchial and rheumatic all your life."

How could Scot help laughing while Doris was being bundled up in the huge plaid garment which left nothing visible but her face? So stiffly was her neck pinioned, that when she wanted to turn her head to nod a good-bye from the bridge, she was obliged to veer entirely round, and stand to do it.

"Well, Doris?"

"I liked it very much," she said, thoroughly understanding her father's interrogatory word. "But, please, papa, as Miss Windish is an old friend of yours, will you ask her to call me Doris? I should like it."

"Certainly, in good time. So you like *her*, too?"

"I like it all so much."

It all!

Yes; saunter, Doris, in the quiet twilight, with your thoughts and heart so full; and stand as long as you will, looking back upon that spot where you lingered in your walk—you and the master of the old house; for the birches will soon lose their golden dress, and never again can you and he walk alone together, free from pain and presage, or from that nameless shadow which shapes itself far off to-night!

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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2

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